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Mary in the Gospels;

OR,

LECTURES

ON

THE HISTORY OF OUR BLESSED LADY,

As recorded by the Evangelists.

BY

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PREFACE.

MANY of these Lectures were written, and some of them delivered, several years ago (1856—1860). They are now completed and published, in consequence of certain other publications which have appeared on the subject of Catholic devotion to our Blessed Lady, in answer to Dr. Pusey's Eirenicon. I have not read Dr. Pusey's work, and cannot therefore say how far anything in the following pages bears upon the subjects of which he has treated. But I have read Dr. Newman's Letter to Dr. Pusey, and Father Gallwey's Sermon, "The Lady Chapel and Dr. Pusey's Peacemaker," and these have persuaded me to print. The very title of these Lectures will sufficiently show that they do not go over the same ground with either of those publications, but aim rather at being supplementary to them. Father Gallwey's discourse is an earnest statement of the Catholic plea for devotion to Blessed Mary; Dr. Newman's Letter is an invaluable addition to our dogmatic theology as to her position in the Divine Economy of man's Redemption. But neither the one nor the other deals at any

length with the only matter to be treated of in the following pages, viz., the notices of our Blessed Lady which occur in the Gospels; whilst both bear very striking testimony to its importance. In an appendix to the second edition of his Sermon, Father Gallwey, *by particular request*, "adds a few words on certain passages in St. Luke's Gospel, in which our Lord speaks of His Holy Mother." Dr. Newman, also, in an appendix, or at least in the notes to his Letter, alludes to the same passages of the Gospels (to which he adds two others), and says of them that they "require some explanation." He has just completed a masterly analysis of those passages in the Fathers which seem to be inconsistent with the belief and sentiment of the Church of the present day concerning the Blessed Virgin; and having thoroughly disposed of these difficulties, he offers, "before concluding, briefly to take notice of two questions which may be asked;" and one of these concerns the passages in the Gospels referred to. His notice of this particular question, clear and pregnant though it be, scarcely exceeds a page in length, and its application to all the details of the Gospel history of our Lady may not be recognized by a prejudiced or careless reader. Hence a Protestant review of the Letter tried to escape from its keen logic and unanswerable arguments, by saying that Dr. Newman had wasted his labour in dealing with the patristic difficulties of his subject, whilst the Scriptural difficulties yet remained *unsolved*. It is to these Scriptural difficulties

that the following pages are mainly devoted, and it is believed that all will be found to have been fairly stated and examined.

I had intended to have published these Lectures last May, but was prevented by illness. Since that time, the subject has been treated by an able writer in the *Dublin Review;* and whenever his solution of a difficulty has contained anything new, or differed from that which had been adopted in these pages, his remarks have been embodied in the text or mentioned in a note. The substance however of the present work, and the very language of a portion of it, has been taken from the second and third volumes of Auguste Nicolas' *Nouvelles Études Philosophiques sur le Christianisme,* or *La Vierge Marie d'après l'Évangile, et dans l'Église.* I had originally intended to publish a translation of that work, or rather to put the principal parts of it into a popular form, suited to the needs of English Protestantism. But the first is the only Lecture which was completed in execution of this plan; traces of it may be seen, more or less clearly, in parts of the second, twelfth, and last. In the rest, I have made the freest use of M. Nicolas' arguments and language, but mixed with other matter of my own, or of other writers. I make here this general acknowledgement of my obligations to M. Nicolas, because it would have been impossible to specify them in detail. My obligations to other authors are acknowledged, each in its own place, so far as I now know them. Never-

theless I fear it may have sometimes happened that passages from the Fathers, or even from modern authors, have been transferred to these pages without any acknowledgement at all, in consequence of the long interval which has elapsed since most of the Lectures were written, and written for the pulpit only, not for the press. This is of the less consequence however, since it is not pretended that they contain anything new; they are made up of what the faith, wisdom, and piety of our fathers have handed down on the subject of which they treat, and they are put together and published in their present form, only from an earnest desire to make some contribution, however small, to the great work which seems to be going on around us, the gradual removal of those prejudices which for so many ages have obscured the face of truth in this country.

J. S. N.

St. Mary's, Oscott,

In Fest. Patroc. B.M.V., 1866.

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LECTURE I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE OBSCURITY OF OUR BLESSED LADY IN THE GOSPELS.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,

I have undertaken to give you a course of instructions upon the life of our Blessed Lady as recorded in the Gospels. But here I shall be met at once, upon the very threshold of the subject, by an objection which is often urged, and which, I doubt not, has already suggested itself to some of you; viz., that her life is not recorded in the Gospels at all, or, at least, that the notices of it are so few and simple, that it would not be possible to form from them a complete portrait of her. In fact, this is the very stronghold of Protestant argument against our devotion to the Blessed Virgin. They say

that nothing is more certain or more remarkable in the Gospel narrative than the profound silence and obscurity in which her history is involved. It is true, indeed (they acknowledge), that she appears for awhile in the beginning of the Gospel, from the very necessity of the case, because Jesus was a child and Mary was His mother; and whatever, therefore, is told about the conception, birth, and infancy of Jesus, could not possibly be told without some mention at least of Mary; that this accounts for her being the principal figure, or one of the principal figures, in the mysteries of the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Purification, and some others; but that, after this, as soon as our Blessed Lord appears and acts for Himself, beginning "to do and to teach," then our Blessed Lady immediately disappears into an obscurity from which she scarcely again emerges; that henceforth the Apostles, the disciples, and even ordinary men and women to whom our Lord spoke, or for whom He did anything, occupy a more prominent position in the pages of the Gospel than Mary does. Nay, even more than this; Protestants remind us—and some of you whom I am now addressing were once Protest-

ants yourselves, and may still have many impressions left upon your minds as to the teaching of Holy Scripture upon this subject, which make it important that I should explain it to you as fully as I can; Protestants, then, I say, remind us—that it is not mere obscurity, not perfect silence in which our Blessed Lady is buried in the pages of the Evangelists; that her name *does* appear two or three times upon the surface, but only to be slighted and, as it were, driven back again by some apparent rebuke. She is not merely passed by; she seems to be almost rudely thrust aside.

Let us consider this objection in its twofold form before we proceed to examine our Lady's life in detail.

It is said, then, that whereas other children of Adam are noticed by our Divine Redeemer in a way which has secured for them an everlasting renown, one alone stands buried in the darkest and almost impenetrable shade, and that one is Mary, His Mother. Of St. John the Baptist, Jesus says that he is something more than a prophet, and that there has not arisen a greater among those that are born of women; of Simon, the son of Jonas, He says that he is Peter, and

upon this rock He will build His Church; of the Chananæan woman, that her faith is great; of the centurion, that He has not found such faith, not even in Israel; of Mary, the sister of Martha, that she has chosen the better part; of Magdalen, the woman that was a sinner, that, wherever the Gospel was preached (that is to say, throughout the whole world), there what she had done for Him should be told as a memorial of her: these all receive testimony of praise from the lips of our Divine Redeemer; but of the Virgin Mary, His own Mother, her whom all generations were to call blessed, He neither praises the faith nor the devotion; He neither proclaims her dignity nor promises her everlasting rewards; He is wholly silent concerning her. No, not wholly silent: she speaks to Him once on a very public occasion, and He answers, "Woman, what is to Me and to thee?" or, as some of you have been accustomed to hear it, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" She desires to speak with Him again on another occasion, and He uses words which seem almost to disown the relationship between them, "Who is my Mother? and who are my brethren?" And yet once more, when a woman lifted up her voice from among

the multitude to proclaim her praises, saying, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which gave Thee suck," Jesus noticed it only to turn aside the praise from His Mother, and to extend the privilege by making it common to all the disciples, saying, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it."

And the same thing may be observed if we study the actions recorded of our Blessed Lord as well as His words. When He sat weary and thirsty by the well-side, He forgot His own needs that He might convert and instruct the woman of Samaria; when the woman taken in adultery was brought to Him, He became her public advocate and defender; when He saw the grief of the widow of Naim, He had compassion on her, and raised her son to life; when He was Himself sinking under the weight of His cross, He stops to address a few last words to the women who were following Him with tears. For all His creatures He has a look, a word, or deed of kindness; for publicans and sinners, for strangers and harlots, for the multitude crying aloud for His death, for His executioners, and for the very stones of the holy city of Jerusalem;

all these have their share in His tender thoughts of mercy and compassion. Mary alone has none, or seems to have none. Neither word nor deed of love, or but one or two only, is recorded of the Son towards His most Blessed Mother when once His public life has begun. She is not one of the chosen witnesses of His glory on Mount Thabor, nor receives the highest pledge of His love at the Last Supper; and, when she re-appears to bear her share in the sufferings and disgrace of her Son on Mount Calvary, He addresses her not as Mother, but as Woman, and speaks to her only to give her to another. Further yet; pass on to the Resurrection of Jesus, and all the joys and triumphs which followed it. Who, one might have thought, had a greater claim to share in these than His own Mother? who had cared for Him more lovingly? who had followed Him more faithfully? who had stood by Him more perseveringly, even under the terrible shadow of the Cross? who had drunk more deeply of His cup of suffering and humiliation? And who then had a prior claim to hers, to be made a partaker in the joy and glory of His Resurrection? And yet you will seek in vain for any mention of Mary among all

the several appearances of our Lord which are recorded with such minuteness. Blessed was Mary Magdalen, first privileged to see Him; blessed Mary, the mother of James, and her companions, who saw Him next; blessed the disciples going to Emmaus, to whom He made Himself known in the breaking of bread; blessed the Apostles, assembled together in that upper room, when suddenly He appeared in the midst of them; blessed Thomas, who was called to put his finger and his hand into those most sacred wounds; blessed those who were privileged to receive His last words upon earth and to look on Him as He was raised up to Heaven. But which of these blessings is for Mary, the Mother of Jesus? Not one. She on whom the Church calls so triumphantly in her Easter hymn, bidding her "rejoice because He whom she has borne has risen as He said"—she alone, I say, remains, as far as the Scripture narrative tells us—and, of course, in giving you the life of our Blessed Lady as recorded in the Gospel, I am not going to add one iota to the inspired record—she alone remains without a blessing. We see her on Mount Calvary, when Jesus was hanging bleeding on the Cross; we see her again on the

day of Pentecost, when Jesus was gone back into Heaven; we see her nowhere in the interval.

I have now set before you, my Brethren, as plainly as I can, what I believe to be a fair and moderate account of the impression as to our Blessed Lady which many persons receive from a study of the Holy Gospels; and I think it ought not, therefore, to surprise us as a thing unreasonable, that Protestants should sometimes object against our devotion to her, that it seems to them altogether inconsistent with this impression.

Of course I do not mean to say that this impression is true; God forbid. It is one special object of these Lectures to correct its errors and supply its deficiencies, so as in the end to substitute for it the truth. I only mean that since we cannot deny the main facts from which that impression has been derived, it is for us to show that the Protestant interpretation of those facts is false, and the conclusion which is sometimes drawn from them unwarranted. That conclusion may be briefly stated thus:—The Church exalts the Blessed Virgin high above every other of God's creatures; the Bible buries her in obscurity;

therefore, the Church contradicts the Bible. By Catholics, on the other hand, the question would rather be stated in this way. We believe and know that the Blessed Virgin was the Mother of our Redeemer, and that she was the purest, the most perfect and holy of God's Saints; whence comes it then that so little is said about her by the Evangelists? Being so near and dear to our Blessed Lord, as she undoubtedly was, both for her own goodness' sake, and also from her relationship to Him, why is it that we do not read of His ever addressing to her words of kindness and consolation, of praise and exaltation, but often (or at least more than once), and on very public occasions, words of apparent coldness and blame, as though disowning and rebuking her?

This is the problem which must be solved, and I have stated it fully and fairly, as the first step necessary towards its solution. Next I would make a few general remarks, which may help to clear away preliminary difficulties and predispose unwilling minds for the due reception of the truth.

First then, let me observe, that since no one can doubt that the silence of Holy Scripture

about the life of our Blessed Lady is designed, it will hardly be pretended by any man who believes in Christianity at all, but that it is a fact which requires explanation. Mary was the chosen person in whom the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God was to be accomplished, and as such, she had been the subject of many prophecies ever since the world began. By and bye, when the fulness of time was come, she is saluted by an angel as "full of grace," or at the very least, even according to the Protestant version, as "highly favoured;" by one inspired with the Holy Ghost, she is called "blessed among women;" being asked and having given her consent, she becomes the Mother of God; she bears Him in her womb for nine months; she brings Him forth, feeds Him at her own breast, nurses and cares for Him, is the companion of His flight into Egypt, partakes of all His toil and sufferings, and—O greatest mystery of all—He obeys her; and yet little or no notice is taken of her afterwards, so far as the Gospels tell us, by a Son who was the model of all perfection, and who was Himself the author of that commandment, Honour thy father and mother. This obscurity and humiliation is certainly mysterious,

i.e., it is a fact which does not carry with it its own explanation, but supposes some hidden meaning, some profound truth, which challenges our investigation and exercises our faith.

Next, I would have you remember that the real greatness and glory of Mary is all wrapped up and contained in that one thing, that she was the Mother of Jesus, Mother of the Word Incarnate; and this was a dignity which, having once been given, could never be recalled. No subsequent silence, or apparent silence, in the sacred narrative, could ever counterbalance this one overwhelming fact, which is acknowledged by all those whom I now address, and which, as I hope to show you by and bye, is a foundation more than sufficient for all the high and glorious things which Holy Church ever says of her. It was impossible that any greater thing should be said of her, or greater thing done in her, than that which is said and had been done; and silence and obscurity are not an unfitting sequel to such a beginning. Other persons might stand in need of words or deeds of Jesus to mark them out as distinguished from the common mass of mankind. But Mary needed no such memorial. She was already separated and raised far above

every other daughter of Eve. She had been made the Mother of God, and she remains so for ever.

But next, it is to be noted that the silence of the Gospels about our Blessed Lady is, as has been already hinted, only partial. Even of our Blessed Lord Himself, who lived upon this earth for three-and-thirty years, the Gospel only gives some brief records of His Infancy, and then, in fuller detail, the acts of His public ministry during three years. During these three years it is that we lose sight, as it were, of our Blessed Lady; but before that time, God's providence had so ordered the course of events, that all the principal honours that were paid to the Divinity of His Son Incarnate upon earth, were paid whilst He was in His Infancy, still in His mother's arms; as for instance, the testimony borne by the angelic host on Christmas night, the adoration of the shepherds and of the wise men, the testimony of the aged Simeon, the holy widow Anna, and the rest. These all came at a time when honour and glory were necessarily reflected from them upon Mary also. And above all, she appears before us raised to the highest degree of dignity by that pregnant sentence of Holy Writ, which tells us nearly all we know of Jesus's life

for thirty years, viz., that it was spent in obedience and subjection to Mary and Joseph. By and bye He began His public ministry; and then her maternal relationship to Him, so active and real during his hidden and private life, seems to be suspended, almost extinguished; yet does it therefore follow that it was really destroyed? Take a somewhat parallel case. During the Passion of Christ, His Divinity was (one might almost say) hidden and kept out of sight. Did it therefore cease to be? Is our faith in it thereby impaired? Just so, though Mary's relationship to Jesus was kept out of sight, sometimes ignored or almost denied, during the period of His public ministry, yet it did not therefore cease to be, nor is our reverence for it at all diminished. The Divinity of Christ was (so to speak) passive—so far as the Gospels teach us—during His private life, which lasted for thirty years, and during this same period the dignity of Mary as His Mother is most conspicuous. Contrariwise, during the three years of our Lord's active and public life, the dignity of Mary is obscured, and His own Divinity proclaimed. Which of these obscurities is the greater and the more mysterious? and whence comes it that

men take scandal at the one and not at the other? Alas! there are, I know, those who treat both mysteries alike; who both deny any special privileges and dignity in our Blessed Lady, and who would fain degrade our Divine Redeemer Himself to the level of ordinary humanity; and such men have, at least, the merit of consistency. But you to whom I now speak are not of their number; you certainly profess to believe that Jesus, the Son of Mary, was also God of God, very God of very God, even during those long months when He lay a helpless infant on His Mother's knees, and when He fled to Egypt to escape from a jealous tyrant's hate, when he hungered in the wilderness, or thirsted sitting at Jacob's well, when He wept at the tomb of Lazarus, and finally when He hung naked and dying upon the Cross. Why then do you rashly deny that there may have been special prerogatives in Mary, the Mother of the same Jesus, only because of certain words addressed to her, or a certain reserve of the Gospels about her, which seem to you at first sight hard to be reconciled with them? Does not rather one of these mysteries explain and counterbalance the other? Are they not, as it were, the two sides of the same medal? Do

they not seem to be parts of one and the same Divine plan, teaching mankind lessons of humility and submission by the joint examples of Jesus and Mary? At any rate, it is undeniable, that there is a certain resemblance between them; and it may be, therefore, that when we come to study the subject more closely, we shall find that of all the lessons of Christianity, next after the Cross of our Blessed Lord Himself, there is none more full of instruction for ourselves than this obscurity of Mary; of all the imitations or copies of the life of Jesus, there is none more exact than the life of Mary.

This is not the place, however, in which to insist further upon this consideration. It is time that we should examine more closely the problem which has been set before us, of our Blessed Lady's seeming obscurity in the Gospel history. And for the present, at least, we will accept the statement of that problem as put in its strongest form by Protestant controversialists, and we contend that, spite of its outward appearance seeming to derogate from our Lady's greatness and holiness, yet in its true inward meaning, it in no way contradicts Catholic doctrine, but, on the contrary, raises our Blessed Lady to the

highest possible dignity, and is in itself an additional proof of her sanctity and greatness.

For consider what was the end and object for which the Son of God came down from heaven, and became man upon earth. It was to heal and to save the perishing sons of men. This was the one purpose of His mission; the very thing which gave Him His name and title, "Jesus, the Saviour." "The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." "They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill. I am not come to call the just, but sinners." "I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost." All these are His own words about Himself. And again, in a parable, He describes Himself as a shepherd leaving behind Him, uncared for (as it were) the ninety and nine sheep in the wilderness, whilst He goes diligently in quest of the one that is lost, over which, when it is found, He rejoices more than over all the rest of the flock who had never wandered from the fold. And in the parable of the prodigal son, the same truth is set before us in a yet more striking manner. The fatted calf is killed, the first robe, and the ring, and the shoes, are given to the reclaimed spendthrift and sinner, whilst

the eldest and always dutiful son is (as it were) forgotten and made no account of, suffered to continue at his labours in the field, whilst all this rejoicing is being celebrated over his repentant brother. I say the dutiful son is, *as it were*, forgotten, because, of course, spite of all these blessed and consoling truths with reference to the condition of penitents, it must always remain most certain that innocence is really, and in itself, more pleasing to God, a God of perfect purity and holiness, and more highly favoured by Him in other ways, than penitence, however sincere. Passing this over, however, for the present, thus much is distinctly established by our Lord's own words, that whatever might be His predilections and laws of action, considered as God, yet considered as God made man, and looking only to His life here upon earth, sinners would undoubtedly occupy a greater share of attention, and receive more abundant and more gracious tokens of His love, than those just men (if there were such) who needed not penance, or than His own most Blessed Mother, supposing her to have been miraculously preserved from sin, as the Church teaches that she was.

It is in most perfect harmony, then, with this

view of our Lord's mission upon earth, as derived from His own words, that, whereas we find little or no notice taken by Him of our Blessed Lady, He should have bestowed the highest praises and promised an immortality of glory to the penitent woman who had been a sinner; that He should have placed at the head of His Church a Peter who had thrice denied Him; that He should have chosen for one of His first Apostles and Evangelists a Matthew who had been a publican; as the Apostle to the Gentiles, a Paul, one of the first persecutors; as the first to receive the promise of Paradise, a public malefactor undergoing the just punishment of his crimes. All this, I repeat, is in the strictest harmony with His other words and works: and if any one should be disposed to complain on Mary's behalf, as the dutiful son in the parable complained for himself, "Behold for so many years do I serve Thee, and I have never transgressed Thy commandment, and yet Thou hast never done any of these things for me; Thou hast never singled me out for praise, nor bestowed special privileges upon me, nor given me extraordinary tokens of Thy love;" surely Jesus might well answer in the very words of the father in that same parable,

"My child, thou art always with me, and all I have is thine." This is Mary's privilege, which shall not be taken away from her, and there is no need of those outward and extraordinary manifestations of favour which were granted for the encouragement of the penitent. She was always with Jesus, and already in possession of all His choicest gifts and graces. As the sun when it rises in the heavens illumines all things upon earth, however distant or however near, yet at the same time extinguishes those lesser lights, the moon and the stars, which are in the same firmament with itself, even so the bright rays of the sun of justice, penetrating through the mists of ignorance and corruption in which the whole world was enveloped, imparted life and strength to souls long dead in sin or but feebly exerting themselves against it, but blotted out for awhile and obscured from human vision another purer and nobler being, which owed all its excellence indeed to this same sun, and was in fact being warmed and illuminated by it at this very time in the highest possible degree, only in a sphere beyond the reach of our limited faculties.

I do not set this before you as the only, nor even necessarily as the best, explanation which

can be given of the problem which we are attempting to solve. Other explanations of particular parts of the problem will come before us in the course of these Lectures, some of which may be found abundantly sufficient to cover the whole extent of the difficulty. But I do not wish to anticipate, in this Introductory Discourse, any of the details of the Gospel History. I therefore content myself with insisting upon a general view of the matter which is certainly true, and which ought, I think, to satisfy any unprejudiced mind, that objections drawn from the first appearances of Scripture may be by no means insurmountable, and therefore, that there is no real inconsistency perhaps between the pre-eminence assigned to Mary in the Catholic Church and the silence or obscurity in which the Gospels are supposed to leave her.

It still remains, however, to explain why her Divine Son should not only not have addressed to her words of praise and exaltation, but should even have spoken in terms of seeming censure and rebuke. Let us then now apply ourselves to the solution of this second mystery; and I believe that a reference to the laws of God's dealings with chosen souls will again suffice to unravel the

perplexity, and to bring light out of seeming darkness.

Since the accomplishment of the Incarnation, the only road to glory has been by the way of the cross; if we would reign with Christ hereafter, we must suffer with Him here. Humility is the foundation of all Christian excellence, and without humiliations, a soul will scarcely attain or retain humility. Moreover, humiliations, in order to produce in us humility, must come to us on those very points in which we may seem to be raised above others, and in which we are therefore specially exposed to the danger of pride. Put these simple thoughts together—and there is not one of them which you can call in question —and have you not at-once a key to the riddle which now perplexes you?

Mary has been raised from the low estate of a poor unknown maiden to the unapproachable, incommunicable dignity of the Mother of God. If Lucifer and all his host could fall away from their high estate and be precipitated into hell through a sin of pride, to how much more danger (humanly speaking) was this handmaid of the Lord exposed, who from a lowly daughter of Juda was raised to the dignity of Queen of Angels and of

upon it. A great general, proud of his military achievements, is not humbled by any failure in rhetoric, or because another is preferred before him in matters of mechanical skill; any more than a statesman cares to surpass his neighbours in physical strength, or thinks that his opinion should always be law in matters of naval or military science. But let a general or a statesman meet with disappointment and defeat, precisely where he looked for a triumph, let him fail precisely in those matters in which he most prided himself for his superiority, and this will be his humiliation; this will be his trial, and lesson in humility. To Mary, then, the Mother of God, those would be true humiliations, and *only* those, which should seem to set her aside and disown her in that particular relationship; and these are what were awarded to her. To be called Woman instead of Mother; to have the name and relationship of a mother made common, as it were, to all the disciples, to all who "kept His word and commandments;" to be publicly almost disowned and disavowed, always passed over and seemingly forgotten, these were her humiliations; they were at once the fruit and the test of her more perfect virtue. The supreme humiliation

of the God-Man, Christ Jesus our Lord, was not when He was despised and rejected of men, but when He seemed to be forsaken also by His Heavenly Father, and He burst forth into that agonizing cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" So with our dear Lady (in whose life we look naturally for the most perfect copy of her Son's life, since that is given to be the model of all Christian lives), her greatest humiliation was to be deserted, or to seem to be deserted, by her Son, as He had been by His Father. And, as through all His humiliations, and spite of them all, He was always God, and received, or was entitled to receive, the adoration of men and Angels as such, just so Blessed Mary, spite of all apparent slights and humiliations, remained always the Mother of God, and as such is entitled to our veneration and homage.

I conclude, then, that the objection which Protestants make against Catholic devotion to the Blessed Virgin, so far as it professes to be founded upon the Gospel narrative of her life, is, when rightly considered, no real objection at all, and the prejudice which rests upon it ought to be abandoned. Mary is passed over in silence

by her Divine Son, whilst others are encouraged or rewarded by praise, because, as a physician of souls, He had more need to deal with sinners than with her: she is violently separated from Him, almost disowned and rebuked, because a deep foundation of humility was necessary for the extraordinary height of sanctity that was to be built up in her soul: and of this humility, these humiliations were the occasions and the safeguard.

LECTURE II.

PREDESTINATION OF MARY.

"The Angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a Virgin . . . . and the Virgin's name was Mary."—*St. Luke*, i. 26, 27.

IF we would study the Evangelical history of our Blessed Lady in chronological order, we must turn to the Gospel of St. Luke. He alone it is who has preserved to us all the precious details we have of the Conception, Birth, and Infancy of Jesus; the canticles of Mary, Simeon, and Zachary, the salutation of Mary by the angel and by Elizabeth, and the Angels' hymn on Christmas night, *i. e.* the *Magnificat*, the *Nunc Dimittis*, and the *Benedictus*, the *Ave Maria*, and the *Gloria in Excelsis*. It has been conjectured, not without reason, that he must have enjoyed in

some special manner the love and intimacy of the Blessed Virgin, since it is from her alone (humanly speaking) that he can have gathered much of this knowledge. Even St. Luke, however, tells us nothing of Mary's birth and earlier years. He first introduces her to us in the mystery of the Annunciation in these words, "The angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph: and the virgin's name was Mary."

There are those who would fain understand these words, as though, up to this moment, Mary had been in all respects a mere ordinary woman, differing in nothing from the other daughters of Eve; as though her high destiny had been fortuitous (as it were) and unpremeditated; as though the angel had been sent to her rather than to any other of the Jewish maidens of that day, without any reason at all; as though she had been altogether unprepared and unthought of, if I may so express myself, until the moment came for the immediate accomplishment in her of the stupendous mystery of the Incarnation. Of course all Catholics know this to be untrue; but *how* untrue it is, perhaps we do not

all sufficiently consider. Let us, then, distinctly bring before our minds the care (if one may so speak) with which the Blessed Virgin had been created and adorned by God, and made worthy—for so the Church speaks—of the high dignity to be imposed upon her.

God does not work at random: He does nothing without an end. All things are created for some object or purpose, as men speak, and they are endowed by Him who created them with the special qualifications necessary for the fulfilment of that object. Everything that we see in Nature—the flower, the insect, the bird, and the beast, the earth, the sea, and the skies; and, above all, we ourselves, who see and use these things, and reason about them—in a word, *all* created things, bear on them the impress of design, deep and marvellous, and of which, though their final issue may be beyond our ken, yet enough has been revealed to confound the atheist and to fill the devout soul with joy and admiration; enough to give us the most confident assurance of a sovereign Wisdom that contrived all things at the first, and that still sustains them, guiding and shaping all the several ends of each particular thing towards the accomplishment of

some one grand universal end of all things. This Wisdom, when viewed with reference to the brute creation or things inanimate, we call Nature. There is another and a higher exhibition of the same Wisdom, which manifests itself in the government of the world and in the disposition of human affairs, and this we call Providence: higher than nature, because it has man for its object whom God has placed at the head of nature to rule over it, and in some respects different from it, because of the introduction of a new and independent and often contrary element, *viz.* liberty or free-will.

But, higher still, there is another and a yet more special exercise of this wisdom in that which concerns the attainment of the final end of all things—not the natural, but the supernatural destinies of mankind and of the world, the union of creation with its Creator: and this exercise of the sovereign wisdom of God, working not by nature, but by grace—not for this world, but for the next, is what we call Predestination. Be not alarmed at the word; do not think that we are going to attempt with rash presumption to dive into the eternal counsels of God, or fathom some hidden mystery that is beyond us; not even that

we are going to speak of high and difficult things, too hard for the simplest among you to comprehend. Not at all; we speak of predestination only in the sense in which I have just explained it, viz., as Providence applied to its last end; that same Providence which, in the order of things purely natural, clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the fowls of the air; which, in the moral order (as we call it), overrules all the actions of men to work out His own designs, yet without interfering with man's liberty; and which also, in the highest or religious order, of which we are now speaking, brings about by means of His grace that final end for which all things else were made, to wit, the sanctification of His name and the attainment of our salvation.

The great and special instrument of this work, *the* means which, above all others, brings about this end, is, asy ou know, the Incarnation. And of this St. Paul says,* "The gospel of God which He had promised before by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerning His Son, who was made to Him of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was predestinated

* Romans i. 1-4.

the Son of God in power," &c. This speaking of the Son of God as predestinated can only have reference to His human nature, to the mystery of His Incarnation; for as God, He existed from all eternity; He was co-equal with the Father; He predestinates, not is predestinated. What is here spoken of, therefore, is that eternal decree whereby it was ordained that the second Person of the Holy Trinity should be united to human nature in the person of Jesus Christ; and this Jesus, being both God and man, was predestinated to be the Head of all the elect. Now this predestination of Jesus Christ contains within itself, necessarily involves and supposes as a part of itself, the predestination of Mary also, because it was only in and through her that He was to receive His sacred humanity. It is impossible to conceive of the one without at the same time thinking of the other also. Jesus Christ could only be the subject of a decree of predestination, inasmuch as He was the Son of Man, and He was the Son of Man, only inasmuch as He was the son of Mary. Mary, then, must needs have been included, virtually at least, if not expressly, in that decree which predestined Jesus to be the first-born of the elect.

Hence it is that the Church does not hesitate to apply to our Blessed Lady those well-known passages of Holy Scripture which speak of the origin and dignity of "Wisdom"—passages which seem primarily to be spoken of the uncreated Wisdom, the Word of God, but which also have a manifest reference to His Incarnation; and parts of which, in their literal sense, can hardly apply to any other than her in whom the Incarnation was accomplished; as, for instance, "I came out of the mouth of the Most High, the first-born before all creatures. . . . The Creator of all things commanded and said to me, and He that made me rested in my tabernacle. . . . From the beginning and before the world was I created." "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning. I was set up from eternity, and of old before the earth was made." * Of course I mention these texts in this place, not with any intention of insisting upon the justice of the interpretation which applies them to Mary, but only by way of apology or explanation, showing how they have come to be so applied; viz. that, as "Christ was foreknown before the foundation

* Ecclus. xxiv. 5, 12, 14; Proverbs viii. 22.

of the world, but manifested only in the last times,"* so Mary, too, of whom He was to be born, must needs have been foreknown also, though manifested only "when the fulness of time was come." Indeed, St. Paul says of us all that we were "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world;"† but in how much more eminent a sense must not this be true of her from whom Christ Himself was to receive that flesh and blood which was to redeem mankind?

We must not argue, however, merely on *à priori* grounds and proofs deduced from reason and the necessity of the case. I am to confine myself in these Lectures to what is told us in the Bible. Let us open the sacred volume, then, and see what tokens of this decree of the predestination of Mary are to be found there during the ages that intervened between the Creation and the Incarnation. It is acknowledged that there is an unbroken chain of types, and figures, and prophecies concerning the birth and mission of Jesus, even from the very commencement of the world; is there any token that Mary also was present to the Divine mind from the beginning?

* 1 Peter i. 20. † Eph. i. 4.

It is not necessary that we should rehearse the history of man's creation, trial, and fall. It is only the announcement of the remedy with which we are concerned. "In the midst of His anger God remembered mercy;" and He makes this consoling promise; He says to the devil, who had deceived man and tempted him to his ruin, "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel." These are the words in which the promise stands in our own translation of the Bible; the Protestant translation has it thus: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Other ancient and Eastern translations (we are told) unite the woman and her seed in the promise of victory, saying, "They shall crush thy head." It matters not for our present purpose which of these translations ought to be accepted as the more critically correct; for in each of them the woman stands forward as a prominent feature in the picture. In this first announcement of a promised Redeemer, His Mother is distinctly contemplated and named,

and the Redeemer Himself is mentioned only in His relation to her; He is "the woman's seed;" a very peculiar expression, indicating one who should be born in some wonderful manner, and not according to the ordinary laws of generation; in a word, it points most unmistakeably to the Blessed Virgin Mother, Mary, and her child, Jesus. Thus, the two adversaries, whose strife was to last so long as the sun and moon should endure, and whose combats make up the history of the world, are named in this first page of the Bible; and they are, on one side, the devil, on the other, the woman; and again, the seed of the devil and the seed of the woman.

And as it was in the beginning, so it continued ever afterwards. In all that the prophets announced, in all that the patriarchs and the principal figures of the old law foreshadowed about the coming Messias, "the woman" had her place; they could not be separated, the woman and her seed, the Mother and the Son. At one time it is Isaias who prophesies (vii. 14), "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son;" or again (xi. 1), "There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall riso up out of his root;" where the prophet's words

immediately call to our minds that rod of Aaron, laid up in the tabernacle of the covenant, which in a miraculous manner, and not in obedience to the ordinary laws of cultivation, budded and bloomed blossoms or flowers, and bore fruit,* thereby presenting us with a lively image of the miraculous birth of Jesus from the virginal womb of Mary. She is the rod of Aaron, the rod out of the root of Jesse (the family of David), and Jesus is its flower; a flower springing up as the flowers of the field do, without the care and culture of man. At another time, it is the prophet Micheas (who seems to stand in much the same relation to Isaias as the Evangelist St. Mark does to St. Matthew, each being apparently the abbreviator of the writer who had preceded him), foretelling the future greatness of the little town of Bethlehem as the birthplace of our Lord; and here again (v. 2) special mention is made of her that should bear Him. The prophet first speaks of His Divine generation as the Son of God, saying, that "His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity;" and then he mentions also His human generation, His birth, of the Blessed Virgin, in time, "the time wherein she that

* Numbers xvii. 8.

travaileth shall bring forth." Elsewhere, we find Jeremias (xxxi. 22) declaring that "the Lord hath created a new thing upon the earth, a woman shall compass a man." In the beginning woman was made out of man; now man, *the* man, the Man-God, the beginning of the new creation, shall in the fulness of time be "made of a woman"* and that not in the ordinary way of generation, but by a new creative act. To create differs from to make; it implies not only a work, an operation, but also the introduction of a new principle; and hence it has been observed that the word is used only of three several occasions in the book of Genesis; first, when God created the original matter out of which the world was made; next, when He added feeling to His creatures, as in the creation of animals; and lastly, when He added intelligence, and created man. And now the Blessed Virgin is a new creation. "The Lord hath created a new thing;" new, for two reasons; first, that it was to be the work of God alone, without the co-operation of any creature; and, secondly, the woman was to conceive and bring forth a man,—not a child, but a man. "Had the

* Gal. iv. 4.

prophet said (says St. Bernard),* a woman shall compass an infant, a child, it would not have seemed to be a new and marvellous thing. But now that he has said, a woman shall compass a man, we ask what novelty, what miracle this is? We ask with Nicodemus, 'How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born again?' But we turn to the virginal conception and birth of Christ, and there, amid the many new and marvellous things which it contains, we shall find this also. For Jesus was already a man, even when carried in the womb or fed at the breast; a man in wisdom, not in age; in strength of mind, not of body; in maturity of understanding, not in size of limb."

You see, then, as this same St. Bernard says in another place,† how "Mary was promised from Heaven over and over again to the Fathers; foretold by prophetic oracles, and prefigured by symbolic miracles. For she was that priestly rod which bore a flower though it had no root; she was that fleece of Gideon, which alone was moist with dew when it was dry upon all the

* Hom. 2, de Laud. Virg. Mariæ.

† Serm. inf. Oct. Assumpt. 8.

earth beside; she was that gate in the vision of Ezechiel, which looked towards the East, and which should be shut and not be opened, and no man should pass through it, because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it." And so he goes on, here and elsewhere, to enumerate different types and figures of Holy Writ, which, following the tradition of the Fathers, he interprets of Mary.

Still more distinct prophecies of Mary were those famous women who, from time to time, were raised up in so remarkable a manner, and filled so conspicuous a place in the history of the chosen people—Anna, Debora, Esther, Judith, and others, who in different ways and degrees were really types, foreshadowing her that was to come. The exceptional child-bearing of some, the extraordinary virtues and heroic exploits of others, their beauty and strength, or wisdom and simplicity, their faith and purity, their courage and sanctity, are all united and find their perfect realization only in "Mary, of whom was born Jesus;" just as the most famous patriarchs and prophets, judges and warriors, priests or other heroes of the Old Testament, are typical in various ways of Christ, the King and Priest and

Prophet of the whole world and of all time. But whilst Protestants willingly acknowledge the prophetic character of all in the Old Testament that can be referred to Jesus, and do not require a distinct warranty of Holy Scripture for each reference, they have not been in the habit of making a similar use of other passages which refer to Mary; and since such an application of them is nowhere enjoined in the sacred Books, they can scarcely claim a place proportioned to their importance in these Lectures. The general subject, however, of her predestination could not be altogether omitted, since it is certain that she was present in an especial manner to the mind of God, and was set before the minds of men in prophecy, from the beginning of the world, so that a devout student of the Old Law, "looking for the redemption of Israel,"* must needs have looked also for the coming of some very remarkable woman to be the Mother of the Redeemer.

We must not then allow ourselves to be misled by the extreme simplicity of the Gospel narrative, when first the name of Mary appears in the records of history. More is contained in the words than appears upon the surface. "The

* St. Luke ii. 38.

angel Gabriel was sent from God to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, and the virgin's name was Mary;" but that virgin was "not now found by chance, nor for the first time; she had been chosen from the foundation of the world; she had been foreknown by the Most High and prepared for Himself." *

This is the point on which I would have you specially to meditate before you examine the facts of our Blessed Lady's life in detail. "She had been foreknown by the Most High and prepared for Himself." For what use or purpose had she been so prepared? since in a certain sense it is true of every one of us, that we were foreknown by God and prepared for Himself; as the wise man says, "The Lord hath made all things for Himself;" and again the prophet Isaias, "I have created man for my glory." † Nevertheless forasmuch as "in a great house (such as the world is) there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth, and some, indeed, unto honour, but some unto dishonour," ‡ it behoves us to inquire to which of these classes the Blessed Virgin belongs, since an all-wise and all-power-

* St. Bernard, Serm. 2 de Laud. Virg.

† Prov. xvi. 4; Isaias xliii. 7. ‡ 2 Tim. ii. 29.

ful God ever apportions the means to the end, and fits every instrument for the work for which it has been chosen. For what then did He prepare the Blessed Virgin? We call upon her in the Litany of Loreto as Vessel most honourable, Spiritual Vessel, Vessel of singular devotion, and with good reason, since "He that made her rested in her tabernacle." She was created to be the Mother of Jesus. Consider how much is involved in this. If, when a material temple was to be built for the mystical habitation of God under certain signs and symbols in the Old Law, God Himself gave the plan for it, and ordered all things, even to the minutest details connected with its erection, how much more, now that a living temple is to be created for the corporal indwelling of the Son of God, will it be prepared with care and finished with a solemnity and magnificence worthy of its object!

"Wisdom hath built herself a house," as Holy Scripture speaks.* Wisdom, the Eternal Wisdom of God, God Himself, has decreed from all eternity to build Himself a house. He does not choose one already existing, the best He can find, and then furnish it as best He may. He is the

* Prov. ix. 1.

Almighty Creator, and He builds the house Himself. It is not a house which He will merely enter as an independent Being, dwell in for awhile and then abandon; it is a house from which He is to fashion for Himself a body that shall henceforth and for ever be a part of His own Being. From all eternity He has been, He is, and ever will be God; "God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds;" but He is now about to become also "Man, of the substance of His Mother, born in the world;" and this His chosen Mother is the Virgin Mary. He is to become "perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting." This human flesh once united to His Divinity will never again be separated from it; its sufferings and death will redeem the world. It will afterwards rise again from the dead, ascend up into Heaven, and sit on the throne of the Most High. And this human flesh, so highly privileged, so intimately united with God, is to be formed of the blood of Mary. "What wonder then," as St. Bernard justly asks, "if God, who shows Himself wonderful in all His Saints, show Himself yet more wonderful in His Mother?" It has been well said that "a wonder is no wonder in a wonderful subject." What

more wonderful subject can be conceived than that God should vouchsafe for man's sake to be born of a woman, and that that woman should be a mother, yet remain a Virgin? It ought not then to surprise us if we should find other wonders in the history of this Virgin's life; rather it would be strange if we did not. I have no intention, however, of entering into particulars and speculating what gifts and privileges might reasonably be expected in her, nor do I invite you to enter on any such speculation yourselves at a time when we mean to follow so closely the inspired record of her life. I only beg you to have this general reflection present to your minds whilst listening to what may be said upon that record, and especially to recall it and dwell upon it as often as you may feel perplexed or scandalized by Catholic doctrine about her power and prerogatives.

LECTURE III.

MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD.

"Mary, of whom was born Jesus."—St. Matthew i. 16.

I MUST detain you once more with some preliminary considerations before we proceed to examine the actual facts of our Lady's life recorded in the Gospels. And I will preface what I have to say with a story which is told of some poor Catholic lad who was picking up what instruction he could get in reading and writing at one of the so-called ragged schools in London. It is said that a Protestant Bishop and other Anglican clergymen came on some occasion to examine the scholars, and that this boy was asked if he could say his prayers. He began at once to repeat the "Our Father," for which he

was duly praised, and then went on (as any well-instructed Catholic child would not fail to do) to recite the "Hail Mary." But here his Reverend examiners interrupted him, exclaiming, "Oh no, not that; we don't want to hear anything at all about her; can't you say something else?" The boy did as he was bid, left the Angelical Salutation unfinished, and began the Apostles' Creed. But now it was *his* turn to stop. He broke off in the middle of the second article—"and in Jesus Christ our Lord"—and asked for further instructions. "What am I to do now, Sir, for here *she* comes again you don't want to hear about?"

I do not know whether this story is really authentic; certainly there is nothing at all improbable about it, and it very aptly illustrates a grave and serious truth which lies at the bottom of this whole subject, and which I want specially to insist upon at present; viz., that it is impossible to make any progress in the right understanding of the Christian Faith without encountering our Blessed Lady, and being forced to assign to her a very definite place in the scheme of Christian doctrine. Her name appears in the very first page of the Evangelical records, in the first chapter of the first of the Gospels, and that

which is there said of her is not only the sum and substance of all her greatness, it is also a very valuable compendium of the whole Christian creed: "Mary, of whom was born Jesus."

The whole of the Christian religion depends upon the doctrine of the Incarnation. "No other foundation can any man lay but that which is laid, Jesus Christ our Lord." He is the corner-stone of the whole religious edifice. The union in Jesus Christ of the two natures, the Divine and the human, is (one may say) the whole of Christianity; everything depends upon it. His words and His works all have their value from the fact that they were done and spoken by One who was at the same time perfect God and perfect man, yet but one and the same Person. What would be His moral teaching or His example to us, except He were man even as we are men, with a body and a soul like ours; a will, an understanding, a heart and affections like ours? Or, on the other hand, how should we have been profited by His death except He had been God, and so His sufferings of infinite value?

It is easy to see that no Christian doctrine would have any meaning at all if this one doctrine were not first secured. Once admit a doubt upon

this, and all becomes vague and uncertain. And hence it happens that, on the one hand, the Church so delights to proclaim and honour it; and, on the other, that heresy and infidelity are so unwearied in their attempts to corrupt, obscure, or destroy it. The Church does all that she can to impress it deeply on men's minds and hearts. Three times a day is it proclaimed by the ringing of the *Angelus* bell, for the meditation of the faithful. Twice in the holy sacrifice of the Mass—in the Creed and in the last Gospel—does she bid us all fall down upon our knees to adore, at its bare announcement. There is no other mystery which can compare with this, in the honour with which the Church commemorates it; in fact, the whole Catholic religion is one continued proclamation of this truth, for it is the worship of God made man. On the other hand, no other mystery has been ever so fiercely and so unceasingly attacked, sometimes on one side, sometimes on another, sometimes on all sides at once. I mean, sometimes by denying the perfection of the Divine Nature of Christ, sometimes of His Human Nature, sometimes of both. Even in the lifetime of the beloved disciple himself, there arose some who denied that Jesus had been a

perfect man. They said that He had no real body at all, but only the appearance of one; or again, that He had a body, but not of flesh and blood like ours; one that was framed in the heavens, fashioned in some other way and of some other materials, so that He did not really suffer what He seemed to suffer; or, acknowledging that the body indeed was real and human, they maintained that He, the Divine Person, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, only took possession of it after it was born, and left it again before it was crucified. Presently, another set of heretics arose who denied the Divinity of our Lord. They said He was a real and perfect man, but not God; something more than an ordinary man, a singularly just and holy man, a prophet, one specially favoured, inspired, dwelt in by the Holy Spirit of God, yet still not really Himself a partaker in the Divine Nature, equal to God the Father in all things; or they allowed that He was God, but yet not the one true and living God. In one way or another they continually sought to dissolve (as Holy Scripture speaks*) Jesus Christ, *i.e.*, to separate His two natures of God and man, and to deny the perfection either of one or of the other.

* 1 John iv. 3.

And in these modern days all the old heresies which once succeeded one another with rapidity yet distinctness, are mixed in the minds of men pell-mell, and held (as it were) in solution in the world's atmosphere; so that it is true to say of a great number of Christians that to them our Divine Lord is a being of the imagination, which they paint to themselves, and, if forced, would put into words to others, rather by means of negations than by positive assertion. Instead of holding distinctly and positively, and with the firm assurance of Divine faith, that He is both God and man, and both in all perfection, they think of Him as God only when they find it inconvenient or difficult to think of Him as man, and they think of Him as man only when the sufferings and indignities inflicted upon Him make them wish to forget that He is God; thus destroying Him, as it were, by means of His double nature, and holding Him in suspense between the two. They never think of His actions, of His whole life, of everything He did and suffered, as having been done and suffered by one Person, who was at one and the same moment both God and man; but they divide and multiply Him, thinking of Him as two Persons,

and attributing one class of His actions exclusively to His Humanity and the other to His Divinity.

Now, the one true and only sovereign remedy against this decomposition of the fundamental dogma of the Christian religion (which, alas! is very common in these days) is to be found in the dogma of the Divine Maternity of Mary—"Mary, of whom was born Jesus." Once get a man to believe and confess this in its true sense, and he cannot hold any false doctrine upon the Incarnation.

This is the foundation upon which it all rests —Jesus was "born of Mary." He might have come into the world in some other way; He might have taken to Himself flesh and blood, and the form of a man by creating a full-grown body for Himself out of the slime of the earth, as He made Adam at the first, or, by a new creation, out of nothing. But if He had done this, men might have doubted whether indeed He were truly man; they might have said, He was only a man in outward appearance, just as the Angels sometimes under the Old Dispensation assumed this form, accidentally and externally only, for a time. But now that we know that He was conceived in the Virgin's womb—"born of the Virgin Mary," as we say

in the Creed; "made of a woman," as says St. Paul—there is no room for cavilling; no excuse for disbelief. He must needs be a true and perfect Man, our brother, because, like one of ourselves, He was born of a woman; He had a mother; He was once carried in the womb, He was then a baby, an infant, a boy, a young man, and finally of mature age. On the other hand, He was something more than man, for His conception and birth were not altogether after the model of those of other men. His mother was a virgin, and always remained so, before, and in, and after the birth of her Son; and this could only be because her Son was God. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

Thus, then, my Brethren, it is a right belief about the Divine Maternity of Mary, which is the most perfect safeguard and security of the doctrine of the Incarnation. The prerogatives with which the Church invests her are essential to the Catholic faith, and integral to the worship of Christ. To honour "Mary, of whom was born Jesus," is to profess Christianity in its most perfect

and essential act. It confesses Jesus Christ to be man, for He is the son of woman; it confesses Him to be God, for this woman, this mother, is a Virgin; it confesses Him to be one person, God-man, because it is by one only nativity, by His conception and birth of the Virgin Mary, that these two natures (of God and man) were ever united in one Divine Person, Jesus Christ; and so this Virgin-Mother is the Mother of God. Wonderful titles! which sound like contradictions, and *are* mysteries; and though each by itself is a mystery and inexplicable, yet, if added to the other mystery, and so doubled, it really becomes less mysterious, more intelligible. A God-man! a Virgin-Mother! either title, taken alone, is beyond our comprehension; taken together, they in some sort explain one another—they are correlatives. Mary is a creature, a woman, a mother, and therefore her Son is man; but she is also a Virgin, and this because her Son is God, and with God all things are possible.

You see, then, how intimately connected is a right faith about the Incarnation with a right faith about our Blessed Lady; and when anybody professes to be scandalized at what he hears or reads in ordinary Catholic books of devotion

about the dignity of our Blessed Lady, we may reasonably suspect one of two things; either indifference, or positive error and ignorance about the great doctrine of the Incarnation. Yet surely neither ignorance nor indifference can ever be safe with reference to so fundamental a mystery. The knowledge of the Incarnation is not a mere matter of learning and scholarship, for those who are deeply read in theology. It should be the study of every one of us. All our eternal interests are at stake upon it—wrapped up and contained in it; there is nothing in the whole world which we are so concerned to know, and to know well, as the Incarnation; and I will add, nothing is more insisted on in Holy Scripture. If Holy Scripture is to be our guide, there can be no question but that a great deal depends upon a right faith and knowledge about the Incarnation. "This is life everlasting, to know Thee the only true and living God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." "Who is a liar but he who denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is Antichrist, who denieth the Father and the Son." "Every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God; and every spirit that dissolveth Jesus, is not of God."

"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God." "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God:" and "whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world; and this is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" "No man, speaking by the Spirit of God, saith anathema to Jesus; and no man can say the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost."*

Let it not be said, then, that these are idle subtleties, which ordinary Christians need not trouble themselves about. No; the Athanasian Creed speaks truly as well as plainly when it says, "It is necessary to everlasting salvation that a man believe *rightly* the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ;" and no man can believe it rightly, and at the same time think slightingly of her in whom the mystery was wrought, "Mary, of whom was born Jesus." With reason did a Christian controversialist of the third century,†

* 1 John ii. 22; iv. 2, 3, 15; v. 1, 4, 5; 1 Cor. xii. 3.

† St. Archelaus, Bishop of Caschæ, in Mesopotamia, A.D. 278. Disput. cum Manete, § xlix.—*Bibl. Vet. Pat. Galandii*, tom. iii. p. 603.

arguing against those who denied that Mary was really the Mother of Jesus, vehemently contend that the doctrine he was defending was no idle speculative question, but one in which the whole Christian religion was engaged. "If you deny," he said, that "God was born of Mary, then you must deny also that it was God who suffered and died on the Cross, for suffering and death are only possible to one who has first been born. Then the whole worth and value—the very name of the Cross disappears; and if the Cross is taken away, neither did Christ rise from the dead. And if Christ be not risen, then is there no future resurrection for any of us; and if so, no judgment, for it is clear that if I do not rise again after death, neither shall I be judged; and if there be no future judgment, there is no obligation to keep the commandments of God. 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' All these things hang together—follow from one another by a necessary consequence. Contrariwise, if you confess the Divine Maternity of Mary, then follows the reality of the Passion; from the Passion, the Resurrection; from the Resurrection, the universal judgment; and so all the commandments of God are saved, and their obligation

enforced. For as all the law and the prophets are contained in those two commandments, Thou shalt love God, and thou shalt love thy neighbour, so all our hope is suspended from the child-bearing of Mary." And this is why the Church lays so much stress upon the reality of that birth, singing—

"Ave *verum* Corpus natum De Mariâ Virgine;
Verè passum, immolatum In cruce pro homine."

"Hail, *true* Body born of the Virgin Mary, which *really* suffered and was offered on the Cross for man."

I have insisted upon this matter at some length in order that I might impress upon you the importance of the subject on which we are engaged, in opposition to the prejudices of some who may find it hard to give their attention to the Lectures which are to follow, as believing them to be, even if true, yet unimportant and unpractical. I ask you to take my word for it at present, that all the goodness, the greatness, and the glory which we reverence in Mary are really dependent upon the truths contained in that one word *Deipara*, Mother of God; but I ask you also to consider for yourselves, and to meditate upon what the truths contained in

that word really are. Even Calvin himself could say, that "it is impossible for us to recognize the blessing which Jesus has brought us, without *at the same time* recognizing how much God has honoured and enriched Mary, by having chosen her to be the Mother of His only Son." When, therefore, a man professes himself to be indifferent, insensible about anything that can be said of Mary, it is not upon Mary, but really upon Jesus—upon God—his Saviour, that his insensibility falls; he is wanting in faith, or in love, with reference to the Incarnation. He has never tried to realize to himself what is meant by the Son of God becoming man; or, having thought of it, his affections have not been warmed towards it, and he treats it as a common ordinary thing. If, indeed, the Word being made flesh be an ordinary thing, then Mary, in whom that mystery was accomplished, may have been altogether an ordinary being, endowed with no special privileges, and deserving no special honour. But if, on the contrary, that mystery be the crowning work of God's creation, the end for which all things were and are, then surely it is only reasonable to expect that she on whose will it once depended, at whose word it began to

be, in whose womb it was brought to maturity, should be a being of high and singular gifts, endowed with many and great prerogatives, and to be reverenced with no common honour. *No* honour, no privilege (provided only that it be possible and lawful in a creature) can be thought extravagant and out of place in one who alone of the whole human race was deemed worthy to have a Son common to herself and the Eternal Father, the Creator and Lord of all things. Once believe that He whom Mary bore in her womb and brought forth was God of God, very God of very God, and all honour that man can pay her seems comparatively small. Though a man should have the wisdom of angels and of men, the eloquence of the prophets and doctors of the Church, and as many tongues as there are stars in the firmament or grains of sand on the sea-shore, he could never exhaust—he could never even adequately express—all that is contained in that one fact—Mary was the Mother of Jesus, who was the Almighty God.

And hence it is that Holy Scripture repeats this title so invariably whenever it speaks of Mary. Of other distinguished persons it gives us the birth and parentage, or relations to others and

general condition in life, once for all, and ever after speaks of them only by name. But Mary is always presented to us in mysterious isolation from all other surrounding objects or persons save Jesus alone, and from Him she is never separated. "Mary, the Mother of Jesus," this is her ordinary title in the Gospels; and this not only during His life, and to distinguish her from other Maries, but also after His Resurrection and Ascension, and when she is in the company of the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, and no other women are named. Her Maternity of Jesus was not a mere event in her life,—a quality that belonged to her,—it was her whole history, and the very cause of her being. She was created for this special purpose and no other. She is the Mother of God, just as men are men, and angels are angels. This is the whole account of her being, the definition of her essence, so that she stands alone, forming as it were a class by herself in the hierarchy of created beings, distinct from every other, and, by this special relation, *above* every other, because brought so much nearer to God than any other; as an old writer has said, "Just as one being is called an angel of God, another

a prophet, a herald, a preacher, and so forth, and each is reckoned by his own name according to his rank and dignity, so thou, O Blessed Virgin, shalt be called by a singular and special name, the Mother of God."

LECTURE IV.

THE ESPOUSALS TO ST. JOSEPH.

"The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, and the virgin's name was Mary."—St. Luke i. 26, 27.

WE have already said that nothing is recorded in the Bible as to the birth or parentage, or early life of Mary. She is introduced to us at the time of the Annunciation as a virgin espoused to St. Joseph. This mystery then of her espousals is the earliest fact in her life of which we must speak. I call it a mystery, because every thoughtful Christian must feel that there is something in it which requires explanation. For if Mary really deserves that title which is given to her in the very creeds, and which has ever remained as a perpetual affix to

her name, and almost as a part and parcel of it, if she is really the Blessed *Virgin* Mary, a virgin before the incarnation and birth of Christ, and a virgin ever after it, the mind is naturally tempted to inquire, why then was she espoused and married?

Before answering this question, however, it will be necessary that we should say a few words by way of insisting upon the fact which constitutes the knot of the difficulty, viz., the perpetual virginity of Mary. This fact is seen by every Catholic to be clearly implied in the words with which our Blessed Lady first answered the message of the Archangel. Gabriel had said to her, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son." . . . "And Mary said to the angel, How shall this be done, because I know not man?" Catholic theologians generally have based upon this answer the most confident assertions that Mary had bound herself by a vow of perpetual virginity. I will not say anything about a vow, because this would involve a number of questions with which it would be very inconvenient that we should encumber ourselves at this moment; but that the Blessed Virgin's answer expresses

at least a settled purpose, a fixed resolution to that effect, can hardly be denied. Where else is its force? How else is it an answer to what the angel had said? What sense has it at all, except it means at least as much as this, that for her there was not, and would never be, the ordinary use of marriage?—that she was a virgin, and would for ever remain such? For if not, what difficulty was there in the way of the natural accomplishment of the angel's promise? and what room for her inquiry, "How shall this be done?"

Moreover, it is not to be overlooked that the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary commends itself instinctively to every Christian mind with such force as almost to preclude the necessity of any proof at all. For, as the Protestant Bishop Bull has said, "It cannot with decency be imagined, that the most holy vessel which was once consecrated to be a receptacle of the Deity, should be afterwards desecrated and profaned by human use."* Few, therefore, bearing the name of Christian, have ever entertained so degrading an imagination; none at all, it would appear, before the middle or end of the third

* Quoted by Rev. J. B. Morris; Jesus and Mary, vol. i. p. 361.

century; for St. Epiphanius, from whom we derive our earliest information upon this subject, distinctly speaks of it as a monstrous novelty, worthy to take its place among so many others, the sight of which his forefathers had been spared, and which had been reserved for the age of unsettlement and innovation in which he lived. His life traversed pretty nearly the whole of the fourth century, for he was born A.D. 310, and he died A.D. 403. He enjoyed a high reputation both for learning and piety, and amongst his other works, he wrote a history of all the heresies by which it had been attempted to corrupt the true faith from the beginning down to his own time. He enumerates no less than eighty various systems of error; but there are only two amongst them which especially concern Mary. True to the usual characteristics of heresy, these two erred in opposite extremes. The one dishonoured her by pretending to honour her too much, the other by denying what was her due; and it is remarkable that our knowledge of both should be derived from the same source, that they should both have been refuted and held up to reprobation by the same historian and defender of the true faith. It will be worth while to see how earnestly St. Epiphanius speaks against each.

The heresy of the Collyridians seems to have arisen in Thrace or Scythia, and thence to have been imported and to have taken root among the ignorant population of Arabia. It consisted in the offering of sacrifice, by women, to the Blessed Virgin—an act of supreme worship which belongs only to the one true and living God, and can never without sin be directed to any creature whatsoever. St. Epiphanius therefore brands this error as both absurd, idolatrous, and diabolical; yet at the same time he is careful to guard himself against all suspicion of coldness or want of devotion towards the Mother of Jesus. "The body of Mary was holy," he says; "it was the very temple and dwelling-place of holiness; this I know and acknowledge; nevertheless she is not God. However excellent and exalted she may be, and however great the honours which have consecrated her both in body and soul, yet she is still a woman of the same nature with other women. And since this is so, how has the deceitful serpent contrived by crooked devices to renew the errors of idolatry? Let Mary be held in honour, most assuredly; but let none be adored, save only the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Let no one adore Mary,

for this is not appointed to any woman; no, nor to any man either; the very angels themselves are not sufficient for it. It is reserved to God. Let these evil thoughts, then, written on the hearts of misguided men, be altogether blotted out; let this fruit of the fatal tree vanish from before men's eyes; let the creature turn back again to the Creator; let Adam and Eve turn again to honour God alone; let them not be led away by the voice of the serpent, but abide by the commandment of God, 'Eat not of that tree.' And yet that tree itself was not bad, but only by it the crime of revolt was occasioned. Let no man then taste of this new fruit of error, formed on occasion of Mary. For, however admirable and good the tree may have been, it was not made for people to eat thereof; and so in the same way, however excellent and holy and highly honoured Mary may be, she was not given to be adored."

I have quoted this passage at length, that you might see at once its straightforward plainness and strength, yet at the same time the delicate caution with which the writer guards himself against misrepresentation, and condemns neglect of the true honour due to Mary.

Next let us see how he characterizes the other class of heretics, whom he calls Antidico-Marianites, and whose special heresy it was that they denied the perpetual virginity of Mary. He speaks somewhat doubtfully as to their origin, but he believes them to have derived this novelty, which he denounces as a "blasphemous opinion and most impious wickedness," from Apollinaris or one of his disciples. He considers them to have been actuated by some hatred against the Blessed Virgin, some envy or falsehood prompting them to obscure her glory and to corrupt the understanding and faith of the Church about her. "They dare to say that after having given birth to the Saviour, she lived as the wife of Joseph, and had other children; and I am not surprised at their saying so," he observes, "since the ignorance of those who have no thorough knowledge of Holy Scripture, and have not studied history, turns and drags about from one error to another those who wish to follow after the truth merely according to their own private judgment." "Whence this wickedness? whence such daring? Does not her very name bear testimony, and convince you, O contentious man? Whoever, or in what generation, did any one ever dare to name the

name of Holy Mary, and not straightway, if asked, add the title Virgin: for from the very names that are used as epithets, proofs of excellence and virtue are made to appear, the saints having received the dignities of different names suitable to the several excellences of each. Thus, to Abraham has been attached the title of 'Friend of God,' and it shall not be taken away from him; and Jacob was called Israel, neither shall this be altered; and two of the Apostles, Boanerges, or sons of Thunder, and the name shall not depart from them; and in like manner to holy Mary has been added the name of Virgin, and it shall not be changed; for holy Mary remained ever undefiled. Does not nature herself teach this? O new madness! O new revolution! But there are many other things too which in olden times, in the days of the Fathers, were never ventured upon, but now one man blasphemes" in one way, another in another. "But whence do men dare thus to attack the Virgin inviolate, her who was deemed worthy to be the tabernacle of the Son, her who out of the tens of thousands of Israel was chosen for this very purpose to be the vessel and home of God? By what impious boldness is it possible for a man to

open his mouth, unchain his tongue, and give utterance to so new and sacrilegious an impiety; instead of hymns of praise and honour, to devise outrages like this, grossly to insult the holy Virgin, and in a word to dishonour that vessel which has been so highly honoured?"

I am not quoting the words of this good Bishop as having any authority in themselves as to the truth or falsehood of the opinion to which they refer. I only use him as a witness to the novelty of that opinion. A few obscure individuals, or very small sects of heretics, may have broached it in earlier times; but it is certain that St. Epiphanius never could have used such strong language about it as he does, if it had not been contrary to the more ancient and universally accepted belief of the Church. Nevertheless, it is worthy of observation that he himself goes on to explain certain passages of the Gospel, which seem, at first sight, to support the heresy, and which had doubtless been urged in this sense by those against whom he wrote; and he says distinctly, "Of course, if Holy Scripture had really said otherwise, we should have received and declared the truth without hesitation, since we know that marriage is not

unholy or forbidden, though priests and prophets have abstained from it by reason of their devotion to a higher service." Since our present lectures, then, have special reference to all that the Gospel tells us of our Blessed Lady, it is necessary for us to examine the texts in question.

They are such as these:—1. St. Matthew,* when speaking of the virginity of Mary at the time of the conception and birth of Christ, has used language which, at first sight, might not unreasonably be supposed to deny its continuance afterwards. 2. Both St. Matthew and St. Luke† speak of Jesus as her first-born son, which (it is said) they would not have done, were it not as certain that she had other children after Him, as that she had none before Him. 3. Lastly, mention occurs in several places of the Gospel,‡ of the brethren of our Lord, and once or twice of His sisters also; and it is not easy to see (so Protestants argue) what kind of relationship is implied by these words except the natural one according to the ordinary sense of the term. I will say a few words upon each of these objec-

* i. 25. † ii. 7.

‡ St. Matt. xii. 46. xiii. 55, 56; St. Mark iii. 31, vi. 3; St. Luke viii. 19; St. John ii. 12, vii. 3, 5, 10; Acts i. 14.

tions in order, borrowing my answers to them, as far as possible, from Protestant rather than Catholic authorities, lest some of those whom I address should mistrust them as far-fetched, and invented to serve a purpose.

And first, as to the words of St. Matthew, that "Joseph took unto him his wife, and knew her not till she brought forth her first-born son," Hooker (whose name you will be familiar with as one of the more distinguished Anglican divines) complains of the early heretics as "abusing greatly these words, gathering against the honour of the Blessed Virgin, that a thing denied with special circumstance doth import an opposite affirmation when once that circumstance is expired;" that is, to express his meaning in more plain and modern English, concluding that the word "until" must needs indicate some subsequent *change;* implying affirmation, after a certain time, of that which is denied concerning the time preceding, or *vice versâ*. Thus, according to the law of interpretation which these heretics insisted upon applying to the words of St. Matthew—when we read in the book of Genesis* that the raven which Noe sent forth from the

* viii. 8.

ark "did not return till the waters were dried up upon the earth," we are required to understand that the raven did return afterwards. Who does not see the falsehood of this conclusion, and agree with Hooker in calling such a mode of argument a "great abuse"? It would be easy to bring together, from various parts of the Bible, a considerable number of other passages, where in like manner a similar mode of argument is manifestly false. Thus, "Samuel saw Saul no more till the day of his death."* Did he then see him afterwards? When God desires to express His determination of punishing the sins of His people, He says by the mouth of his prophet Isaias,† "Surely this iniquity shall not be forgiven you till you die." Was it to be forgiven after death? Again, He says of Himself, speaking to the same children of Israel by the same prophet,‡ "Even to your old age I am the same." Did He therefore mean that after that time He would cease to be the same? And yet once more, David sings,§ concerning the human nature of Christ, "The Lord said to my Lord, sit thou at my right hand until I make thy enemies thy footstool." Is it therefore to

* 1 Kings xv. 35. † xxii. 14. ‡ xlvi. 4. § Ps. cix. 1.

be inferred that after that time Christ will be deposed from that seat? It cannot be necessary to quote other instances of a form of speech so common, and elsewhere so readily understood to mean no more than it actually says. It is true that in the examples given there is something either in the context or in the nature of the case which would make it clear to the reader that no change was intended to be expressed, perhaps even that none was possible. But this is precisely what Catholics contend with reference to this passage in St. Matthew's Gospel. At the time when it was written, the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary had not been questioned in the Church, and he had no occasion for special caution in choosing his forms of speech in its regard. He said what he had to say freely and in a natural way, without any thought of a heresy which as yet had no existence, and all Christians who heard his Gospel would interpret his meaning aright. They would understand him as desiring to call special attention to what happened before the birth of Christ, but as being wholly silent with regard to anything that may have happened afterwards. It did not enter into his purpose to speak or

think of this; it was no part of the Gospel he had to deliver. The miracle was, that Jesus should have been born of the Virgin Mary without having any man for His father. This was the foundation of all Christian doctrine, and this, and nothing more than this, St. Matthew records.

2. But he also calls Jesus Mary's "first-born son," and so does St. Luke; and it is objected that a first implies a second. This, however, is by no means true, according to the ordinary use of language, either sacred or profane; and with reference to this particular subject, all must acknowledge that the title of "first-born" is often given in Holy Scripture to an only child. Indeed, it could not possibly be otherwise among the children of Israel, whose law required that the "first-born" should be consecrated to God or redeemed; so that this title was sure to be given to the first son of every Jewish woman, whether any other children followed or not.* Moreover, no student of holy writ can fail to remember that Jesus Himself is called "the

* See Exod. xiii. 2; also iv. 22, and Josue xvii. i., where Machir, the only son of Manasses, is called his first-born.

first-born among many brethren;"* and in whatever sense this is spoken, may it not also be said in the same sense that Mary has many sons? I do not mean that this thought was present to the writer's mind; on the contrary, I believe that he wrote according to the ordinary idiom in use among his countrymen, which I have just explained. Nevertheless, we may piously and gratefully recognize this further meaning underlying his words, viz., that as Jesus is called the first-born of the Father, because, though He was the only-begotten Son by nature, He had many brethren who had been made sons of God by adoption and grace, so He was also the first-born of Mary, because, though she never bore any other son in the flesh, yet by His appointment she has received a multitude of other children by adoption and grace, to wit, all His faithful disciples to the end of the world, to whom, in the person of the beloved disciple St. John, He gave His Mother to be their mother, as He hung upon the cross.

3. There remains yet the third objection drawn by Protestants from the letter of Holy

* Romans viii. 29.

Scripture against the perpetual virginity of Mary; viz., that the Gospels speak of the brothers and sisters of Jesus.

It is hard to believe in the good faith of those who urge this objection, not only because of the well-known Jewish practice of extending the name of brothers beyond the strict relationship which we understand by that name to the far more extensive relationship of consanguinity or kindred, but also because the combination of some of the passages in the Gospel, in which these brethren of Jesus are mentioned, makes it quite certain that they were the sons, not of Mary the Virgin, but of another Mary, her kinswoman, called Mary of Cleophas.*

It does not affect the question in hand, to inquire what is the precise meaning of this phrase, Mary of Cleophas; whether she was his wife, or his daughter; all that is necessary for our present purpose is that we should be able to identify her as the mother of the "brethren of Jesus," and at the same time to distinguish her from Mary, "the Mother of Jesus;" and this is not difficult. For St. Matthew † mentions by name among the brethren of Jesus, James and Joseph,

* St. John xix. 25. † xiii. 55.

and both St. Matthew and St. Mark enumerate amongst the women who were looking on at the crucifixion, "Mary Magdalen and Mary the mother of James and Joseph."* But St. John,† who as an eye-witness has described the scene on Mount Calvary with greater precision than the other Evangelists, tells us that "there stood by the cross of Jesus, His Mother, and His Mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen." Who has ever doubted that this Mary of Cleophas is the same as Mary the mother of James and Joseph? And she is called the sister (that is, probably, the cousin) of the Blessed Virgin; so that we see at once both how James and Joseph came to be called brothers of Jesus, and that they were not really brothers, but only cousins. Surely, then, nothing but the most perverse determination to contradict the teaching of the Church would seem capable of accounting for the obstinacy which would fain insist on the literal interpretation of the words "brethren of Jesus," with reference to some persons of whose parentage we are left in ignorance, whilst it is constrained to confess, concerning others who are mentioned at the same time and by the same title, that they were

* St. Matt. xxvii. 56; St. Mark xv. 40. † xix. 25.

not His brothers, but only more distantly related, as members of the same family, descended from some common ancestor.

We need say no more for the solution of those objections against the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, which are drawn from incidental words or phrases to be found in the Gospel. They are so weak in themselves, and the belief against which they are directed is so universally prevalent, and so firmly rooted throughout the whole Church both in the East and West, that I do not think they would ever have been persevered in, but for the apparent support which they receive from the fact of Mary's marriage to St. Joseph. The Gospels themselves tell us that after the conception of Christ, and before His nativity, Joseph was admonished by God to complete the espousals in the usual manner, "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife;" and it is argued that to suppose that they would be commanded to complete their public union, and yet not be intended to live in the relation of husband and wife, would be to suppose an effect without a cause, a special interposition of Providence, without a special reason to produce it.

To this it might be enough to answer in the words of St. Augustine,* "Let us allow that it is possible for God to do some things, the reason of which we cannot investigate; in such matters the reason of the thing is to be sought for only in the power and will of Him who does it." However, the Fathers of the Church have assigned several reasons for the mystery of the espousals, abundantly sufficient to explain and justify this interposition of Providence. For first, the marriage of Mary was necessary for the preservation of her good fame, and of that of her Divine Son. God has commanded us to "provide things that are good and honourable, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men;" † and He would not have His pure and spotless Mother to be a signal exception to this rule. It was not in the will of God, that the mystery of the Incarnation should be made manifest to the world at the first moment it was accomplished. It was necessary, therefore, that Mary should be publicly recognized as a wife before she became a mother; otherwise the reputation of the Virgin of Virgins, the

* Ep. 3 ad Volusianum: aliter Ep. 137, class. 2.

† Rom. xii. 17.

Saint of Saints, would have been a subject of scandal to the weak, and of mockery and derision to the wicked. The most august of all Christian mysteries, and that which is most especially the mystery of purity itself, would have been obscured by a cloud of evil suspicions.

Moreover, as it was the will of God that His Son made man should be brought up and cared for as other children of men, beginning with helpless infancy, and going on through the various stages of growth until He arrived at maturity, it was necessary that He should be the special charge of one who should fulfil all those duties in His behalf, which belonged to the relation of a father.

Mary too would need a protector in the flight into Egypt, and during her long exile from her native land; and how could this be done more simply and more effectually than by her marriage with St. Joseph?

Finally, to these reasons St. Ignatius the Martyr added yet another, which has been adopted also by St. Jerome, St. Basil, St. Ambrose, and others; viz., that God designed hereby more effectually to conceal from the great enemy of mankind the knowledge that the mystery of the Incarnation was at length accom-

plished; "not as though God feared," says St. Bernard, "lest, if He should make known His work, the Devil should hinder it, but because He who doeth all things that He pleases not only with power but also with wisdom, chose to observe a certain fitness of things and seasons in this most magnificent work of our redemption; and therefore, when purposing to overcome the envious one, He would first leave us a most necessary example of meekness and humility, since it would profit us little that the Devil should be conquered by God, and we should still remain in our pride."

It was the will of God then that the mystery of the Incarnation should be clothed with such outward circumstances as for awhile to conceal it from all human observation; and the espousals to St. Joseph was one principal means whereby this end was effected. As the husband of Mary, and the putative father of Jesus, he hindered men from suspecting that Jesus was anything more than one of the ordinary sons of men. "Is not this man," they said, "the son of Joseph? How then saith He, I came down from heaven?"* Other Saints, Martyrs, and

* St. John vi. 47.

Confessors, Apostles and Evangelists, Priests and Bishops, have been called to give testimony to Jesus by their lives or by their deaths, to spread abroad the knowledge of His name: the mission of St. Joseph was exactly the reverse. He was chosen not as a light to reveal Jesus, but as a veil to conceal Him; not to preach, but to be silent; and most effectually did he fulfil his mission. His silence was unbroken; not a single word of his has Holy Scripture recorded. "God hath made darkness His covert, His pavilion round about Him," says the royal Psalmist;* and St. Joseph was, as it were, such a cloud wherein God chose for a while to hide Himself. But as clouds which obscure the light of the sun from this lower earth, may yet be most brilliant on the other side,—dark on the side of the earth, light on the side of heaven, receiving all the glorious rays of the sun which yet they refuse to transmit, so was it with St. Joseph: in proportion to his obscurity among men was his glory before God. He was chosen to be the spouse of Mary, and so was supposed to be the father of Jesus. The profoundest historical research can elicit no new

* Psalm xvii. 2.

facts about him; the most sublime meditation can never exhaust the mysteries that are contained in these. Surely the Church may sing with confidence of him, if of any of the children of Adam, "there hath not been found one like unto him;" and our own Christian instincts prompt us to say of him what Samuel said of David when chosen to be king over Israel, "the Lord hath sought him a man according to His own heart."

LECTURE V.

THE ANNUNCIATION.

"The angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth.

"To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women.

"Who having heard, was troubled at his saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name Jesus.

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father: and he shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever. And of his kingdom there shall be no end.

"And Mary said to the angel: How shall this be done, because I know not man?

"And the angel answering, said to her: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

"And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren.

"Because no word shall be impossible with God.

"And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her." St. Luke i. 26—38.

THIS passage of the Gospel records not only the crown and centre of the mysteries of Mary's life, all that precedes having tended to this end, and all that followed being only the overflow (as it were) of its fulness, but it records that which is also the centre of the world's history, round which move the very destinies of heaven and earth. It records the Incarnation of the Son of God; for the Annunciation and the Incarnation are in fact one and the same mystery. You will not expect, however, that I should attempt to treat of the whole mystery in general; we have only to speak of it in its relations to Mary; and even of these, I propose to confine myself principally to those points which are often overlooked or called in question by some who are not Catholics.

Everybody who believes in the Incarnation at all, must needs think of Mary as singularly blest and privileged in having been the chosen creature in whom that mystery should be accomplished; but not everybody duly appreciates her share and position in the mystery. They are apt to think of Mary's quality as Mother of Jesus, as though it were some merely external and accidental glory, with which she had no more real and personal connection than ordinary mothers have with the greatness by which their sons may happen in after-life to be distinguished; or again, they think of Mary as though she had been an involuntary, almost an unconscious instrument in the hands of God; they do not recognize the act of her own direct co-operation, which yet was surely there. These then are the points to which I would specially invite your attention in considering the scene before us.

First, let us examine the words of the Angel's salutation of Mary—the very same with which the Church has ever since delighted to honour her. I will not detain you by discussing the difference between the Protestant and Catholic versions of the text, in their translations of a single word, which however cannot fail to have

struck you. "Hail, full of grace," is the Catholic version: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured," is the Protestant, which adds moreover, in the margin, "graciously accepted, or highly graced." This variation is important, as indicative of widely different doctrines on the subject of grace; but upon these we must not enter. I will only observe that our translation is that, not only of the Latin Fathers, but also of the ancient Coptic and Syriac versions of the Bible, and embodies in a very forcible form what is the literal translation of the word used in the Greek, expressing what we cannot doubt to be the truth, viz., that Mary had been long and duly prepared for this supreme moment by many and great graces, plentifully bestowed and faithfully corresponded with during all the years of her life that were past, until at length she was now "full of grace," and made fit to receive into herself, that she might give forth to the world, the very author and giver of all grace Himself.

Yet we must not so understand this epithet, as though she had now attained to the very highest crown and consummation of grace which she should ever reach. For it would be contrary to

all analogy, and quite inconceivable, that she should have received no increase of grace from the Incarnation itself, which was not yet accomplished when these words were spoken, and from the nine months' child-bearing, from her faithful and loving attendance upon her Divine Son during His life, from her Compassion with Him in His death, and her long years of patient expectation after He had gone back into heaven. She was full of grace according to the present measure of her capacity; but the soul that is faithful in its use of grace received, is itself enlarged so that it may receive more grace; and so, though ever remaining full, its fulness at one time will exceed its fulness at another. We need not be surprised then if others besides Mary have sometimes been said to be full of grace, as St. Stephen, for example, just before his martyrdom.* But this does not necessarily put St. Stephen on terms of equality with our Blessed Lady, any more than these same words spoken about herself, put her on an equality with her Divine Son, of whom St. John testifies, "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth."† We may say both of a brook, a river, and a fountain,

* Acts vi. 8. † i. 14.

that they are full of water; they are not, however, on that account all equal one with another; their fulness is proportioned to their nature. Now God gives grace to every one proportioned to the work and office, or dignity for which He destines him, according to that which is said by St. Paul,* "God hath made us fit ministers of the New Testament;" *i.e.*, by His grace He has made us fit to fulfil that ministry to which He has called us. God then, having chosen and called the Blessed Virgin to be the Mother of His only-begotten Son, has bestowed upon her a measure of grace proportionate to that high dignity; and since no dignity within the reach of creatures can be named or thought of (as St. Anselm says), which is not surpassed by this incommunicable privilege of being made the Mother of God, Mary must needs have received from Him a greater fulness of grace than all other creatures whatsoever, to enable her to bear it well, and to fulfil the duties belonging to it.

The Angel continues his address by saying, "the Lord is with thee." Some persons indeed, insisting upon the absence of any verb in the original text, have proposed to read here, "the

* 2 Cor. iii. 6.

Lord *be* with thee," instead of "the Lord *is* with thee;" following the form of a prayer or pious salutation, such as was not unknown among the ancient people of God, and is continued to this day in the Mass and other offices of the Church. It was thus that Boaz saluted the reapers, as he came out of Bethlehem. "He said, 'The Lord be with you,' and they answered him, 'The Lord bless thee.'"* Even Protestants, however, have generally felt the necessity of giving the more direct and positive interpretation to the words in this place, as must manifestly be done also in another place of the Old Testament, where an angel used the same words under circumstances which it will be worth while to set side by side with some of the circumstances of the Annunciation. We read in the book of Judges,† "The angel of the Lord appeared to Gedeon and said, 'The Lord is with thee, O most valiant of men.' And Gedeon said to him, 'I beseech thee, my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why have these evils fallen upon us? where are His miracles which our fathers have told us of?'" Here the answer of Gedeon makes it plain that we must understand the angel to

* Ruth ii. 4. † vi. 12.

have announced a fact, not merely given utterance to a prayer or desire. The angel is come as bearer of a message from heaven, a Divine commission to Gedeon, "in the strength of which he is to go and deliver Israel out of the hand" of their enemies; and he therefore very naturally begins by giving him the assurance of God's special presence with him, as the most certain pledge of future assistance and victory. So here too, to Mary, the angel is bearing a message from heaven, announcing the approaching deliverance of the true Israel out of the hands of their enemies for ever; and in addressing the chosen instrument by whom the coming deliverer is to be born into the world, it is not to be wondered at that he should give a similar assurance. But (it is objected) God is everywhere, and everywhere equally; and St. Bernard answers,* "So indeed He is, according to His simple indivisible essence; nevertheless He exists in His creatures in different ways; in those that are endowed with reason, in one way; in irrational creatures, in another; and of those creatures that are rational, He exists in the good in a different way from that in which He is

* Hom. iii. 4 de Laud. Virg. Mat.

in the bad. His irrational creatures have no means of apprehending or possessing Him. All rational creatures indeed may apprehend Him by knowledge, but only the good by love. Only in the good does He so exist as to be *with* them as well as in them; with them, by a certain harmony and agreement of will; and as long as men so submit their wills to justice, as that there is no dissent between God's will and theirs, they join themselves to God in a very special way; and in this way God is with all the Saints. But He is with Mary in a yet more special manner, for in her there was so great an agreement and union with God, that not her will only, but her very flesh, was to be united with Him; and from the substance of God and of the Blessed Virgin one Christ was made, who was not all from God nor all from the Virgin, and yet was wholly His and wholly hers, without being two Sons but one, the Son of each."

So far St. Bernard, speaking in exact agreement with the language of the Athanasian creed, which teaches us that the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man; God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the

world, and man of the substance of His Mother, born in the world. The Saint continues: "Well then may the Angel exclaim to Mary, 'the Lord is with thee;' for thou hast been chosen, O most blessed amongst women, to give birth to Him whose very name had long since been declared by the Prophets to be Emmanuel, 'God with us;' and not only is God the Son with thee, Whom thou dost clothe with thy flesh, but also God the Holy Ghost, of Whom thou dost conceive, and God the Father, Whose only-begotten Son thou dost conceive. The Father is with thee, for He makes His Son to be also thy Son: the Son is with thee, for thou art she who shall give Him forth to the world: the Holy Ghost is with thee, for with the Father and the Son He sanctifies thy womb, 'and therefore also the Holy, which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God.' Truly then the Lord is with thee in a singular and pre-eminent manner, far beyond anything experienced by Gedeon or any other of those heroes raised up from time to time to effect a temporary deliverance for Israel, as types and forerunners of Him Whom thou hast been chosen to bear, and Who shall save his people from their sins."

The Angel concludes his address by declaring that Mary was an object of singular predilection; "Blessed art thou among women." Gedeon had been addressed by the angel as "most valiant of men," because valour was the quality specially needed in the mission on which he was to be sent; it was this which was presently to be put to the test and to prevail. But to Mary Gabriel said, "Blessed art thou among women," for a blessing it was which he was come to announce; or rather, it was *the* blessing which had been promised ever since the world began, and was now at length to be fulfilled. The world had once been cursed, and that original curse had come through a woman's fault; but now it is to be redeemed, and the blessing which is to redeem it comes through Mary. Hence it is that the heavenly messenger declares her to be "blessed amongst women;" Saint Elizabeth, "filled with the Holy Ghost," salutes her first with this same word; Mary too prophesies it of herself as her own especial title throughout all generations, and the faithful of the whole world never cease to repeat it.

The same words had been used indeed before on more than one occasion. It was part of the

song of Debbora the prophetess over the death of Sisara and the consequent destruction of Chanaan—"Blessed among women be Jahel, the wife of Haber the Cinite," by whom that death had been effected.* Ozias, too, the prince of the people of Israel, had said to Judith,† "Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the most high God, above all women upon the earth. Blessed be the Lord who made heaven and earth, who hath directed thee to the cutting off the head of the prince of our enemies. Because He hath so magnified thy name this day, that thy praise shall not depart out of the mouth of men who shall be mindful of the power of the Lord for ever. . . . And all the people adored the Lord, and said to her, 'The Lord hath blessed thee by his power, because by thee He hath brought our enemies to nought.'" I do not know of any other occasion in which this expression, "Blessed art thou amongst women," is used in the Old Testament; and it is certainly remarkable that in both these instances the women thus distinguished should have done signal service to the Israelites by slaying their special enemies. Shall we be accused of doing

* Judges v. 24. † xiii. 23.

violence to Holy Scripture, if we venture to see in these women faint types of that woman who was one day to crush the head of the great enemy of mankind; types falling short of her whom they foreshadowed, even as the famous men of the old law, Moses and Josue, Samson, David, and the rest, fall infinitely short of Jesus Christ our Lord, of whom, nevertheless, they are confessedly typical? At any rate, the reference to these incidents may serve not only to illustrate, but also to give life and vigour to our comprehension of the Angelic salutation of Mary —a salutation which, considering who it is that makes it and to whom, an angel sent by God to an obscure maiden living in a despised town of Judæa, far surpasses in the magnificence of its praise every other form of words addressed to any of the daughters of Eve.

It follows next to consider Mary's answer to the salutation. For awhile she is silent. She has heard the words that were spoken, but she is "troubled at the saying, and thinks within herself what manner of salutation this should be." Observe with what precision the Evangelist records the cause of her trouble. He fixes it beyond dispute (by a double notice) to

the words that had been spoken, not to the fact of the Angelic apparition itself, but to "the manner of his salutation." On the contrary, when the angel came to Zachary, the same Evangelist tells us that "Zachary, *seeing* him, was troubled, and fear fell upon him." The difference between the two records is very noticeable, and it has not escaped the observation even of some Protestant commentators, as, for example, Grotius, who says, "Zachary is troubled at the appearance of an angel, Mary only at his words." And why was she troubled at his words? Words of praise fill the truly humble soul with trouble and confusion, even more readily than words of blame and reproach trouble the souls of the proud; and both are troubled for the same reason, viz., because the words addressed to them are in such direct contradiction to the habitual thoughts and feelings of their hearts. Insulting or contemptuous words trouble the majority of mankind, because most men do all they can to hide their faults from themselves as well as from others; they think of them as little as possible, but rather dwell with secret complacency upon their fancied excellences, and often entertain themselves with the thought of

these. Words of praise, therefore, they are always prepared for; they harmonize well with their habitual frame of mind, and they are not much moved by them, except there be something in the dignity of the speaker or the occasion on which they are spoken which specially excites their vanity. An ordinary Jewish maiden receiving such a salutation from an angel as Mary received, might have appropriated to herself the blessing spoken without any misgiving or "trouble:" she would have known that it was a promise which had been made long since to her nation, and she might have thought within herself, "Why should it not be fulfilled in me as well as in any other?" But Mary, always occupied before God with the thought of her own unworthiness, and esteeming herself as the least of God's creatures, then hearing herself suddenly saluted as "full of grace and blessed amongst women," was "troubled at the saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be." "She was troubled," says St. Bernard, "but not frightened; troubled by reason of her modesty and humility; not frightened, by reason of her courage; silent and thinking with herself, by reason of her prudence."

The angel therefore encourages her, saying, "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God." This reference to God as the fountain of all grace and the source whence this great blessing was sent, was designed to reassure a soul lost in the consideration of its own nothingness. The angel might go on now and unfold in detail the Royal secret with which he had been entrusted, for she was prepared to receive it. "Behold, thou shalt conceive a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the most High; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David His father, and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever." And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" Mary, troubled before by her humility, now answers with unruffled calm to the Angel, that is, to God; and she answers, by herself asking a question. The Angel had proclaimed great and glorious things of the Son that should be born to her, of the throne which He should occupy, and the everlasting kingdom He should govern. Not one of these things moves or troubles her. She simply believes and accepts them all as the design of God; but prudence, nay

necessity, required her to ask, how this should be; for, as we learn from her own words, she had made a firm purpose of leading a virginal life, and she feared that the Angelical announcement could not be reconciled with this. "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" Not how *can* this thing be done, as though she doubted God's power, but how shall it be, consistently with what she knew and purposed about herself? The Angel respects and removes her scruple, by explaining that the conception and birth of Jesus should be not after a natural but a supernatural manner, not a work of man but the operation of God; and immediately Mary replies, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: Be it done to me according to thy word."

Upon these words it is enough to quote the exclamation of St. Alphonsus: "O what more beautiful, more humble, or more prudent answer could all the wisdom of men and angels together have invented, had they reflected for a million of years!" Consider its wonderful humility. It has just been announced that God is about to fulfil in her all those promises which had been the very life and hope of the whole nation for centuries past, ever since the call of their father

Abraham; that she is to be exalted to that ineffable privilege, the most distant participation in which had been an object of envy to every Jewish maiden from generation to generation; that of her was to be born the Messias, the desired of all nations; yet there is not a word, a thought of self and of her own exaltation to such unparalleled greatness, but only the most ready acknowledgment of her own nothingness in God's sight: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." At the same time there is the most perfect and hearty obedience: "Be it done unto me according to thy word." Unlike Moses, who, when receiving a commission from God, answered and said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharao?" and who, after one and another miraculous token, still persisted in deprecating the charge, saying, "I beseech thee, Lord, send whom thou wilt send,"* until at length God was angry at him; unlike Gideon, who being commanded by the Angel of the Lord to go and deliver Israel out of the hand of Madian, answered and said, "I beseech thee, my Lord, wherewith shall I deliver Israel? Behold my family is the meanest in Manasses, and I am the

* Exod. iii. 4.

least in my father's house;" unlike Ananias at Damascus, who, when commanded in a vision to arise and seek Saul of Tarsus, answered, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints in Jerusalem;* unlike so many others of God's chosen servants, called from time to time for the accomplishment of some great work, some special mission, Mary does not shrink from what is laid upon her; her humility does not degenerate into cowardice, nor hinder obedience; and this, because it is built upon faith. Her low esteem and diffidence of herself is counterbalanced and supported by the most unbounded confidence in God. She knows that He is able to do all things whatsoever He wills, that He chooses the weak things of the world to confound the strong, and that though heaven and earth should pass away, yet shall not one iota of His word fail; and therefore she obeys at once, offers herself to do and to suffer whatever He pleases, because she believes with a firm, unhesitating faith that this messenger has come from God, and that every word which he has spoken shall be fulfilled.

Here, again, her conduct stands out in striking

* Acts ix. 13.

contrast with that of others, to whom at various times God had sent similar heavenly messengers. Thus Gedeon, of whom we have spoken so often, said to the Angel, "If I have found grace before the Lord, give me a sign that it is Thou that speakest to me;" and at a later period, even after he had experienced the singular protection of God under circumstances of danger, he, again and yet a third time, asks from God a new sign to reassure him of His help. "Gedeon said to God, If thou wilt save Israel by my hand, as thou hast said, I will put this fleece of wool on the floor: if there be dew on the fleece only, and it be dry on all the ground beside, I shall know that by my hand, as thou hast said, thou wilt deliver Israel, and it was so . . . And he said again to God: Let not thy wrath be kindled against me if I try once more, seeking a sign in the fleece. I pray that the fleece only may be dry, and all the ground wet with dew. And God did that night as he requested . . . *Then* Gedeon, rising up early," proceeded upon his mission. So, too, Zachary had said to the Angel, "Whereby shall I know this, that my wife shall bear a son, since I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years? And the Angel, answer-

ing, said to him, Because thou hast not believed my words, which shall be fulfilled in their time, therefore thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be able to speak until the day wherein these things shall come to pass." How different is the language of Mary in answer to an announcement, far more difficult of belief than any that had ever been made before by God to man! Zachary, the priest, must have been familiar with the history of his nation; and the child-bearing of Sara in her old age, and of Anna, the mother of Samuel, should have made it easier for him to believe the promise of the angel with regard to himself and St. Elizabeth. But what history had ever told of one born of a virgin? Yet Zachary doubted, and Mary at once believed; and hence, when she afterwards visited her cousin St. Elizabeth, the wife of Zachary, that holy woman filled with the Holy Ghost proclaimed the praises of her faith, saying, "Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord."

Three times, then, does the angel speak to Mary, and three times she answers, in her soul, though not always with her lips; and by each reply she shows herself both full of faith and

understanding of the great mystery, and also elevated and strengthened by grace to bear worthily her own part in its completion. First, the angel salutes her with praises, and she answers by her trouble, *i. e.*, by her humility, the necessary foundation of all Divine operations. Next, he tells her of her future maternity, and of the great destiny that awaits her son; and she receives the announcement with the calm of an invincible faith, and the caution of a supernatural prudence; a faith reasonable and intelligent, and a prudence only requiring to be enlightened as to her own co-operation in the work, lest she should violate some promise made to God and sully that purity which was so dear to her. Then the angel explains more fully, adding marvel to marvel, and announcing wonders yet more wonderful than anything he had said before, and she answers with a promptitude of obedience which only such faith and such humility as hers could have suggested. Had she remained silent, asking no questions at all throughout this angelic visitation, we might have doubted her appreciation of its meaning; had she asked more, we might have doubted her faith or her obedience. As it is, we recognize in her words, and in her silence, in her

whole demeanour during that tremendous conversation (if we may so speak) between heaven and earth, the words and the acts of the Virgin most faithful, Virgin most pure, worthy to be celebrated as the Seat of wisdom and the Cause of our joy by becoming the Mother of our Redeemer.

LECTURE VI.

THE VISITATION OF OUR BLESSED LADY TO ST. ELIZABETH.

"And Mary, rising up in those days, went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda.

"And she entered into the house of Zachary, and saluted Elizabeth.

"And it came to pass; that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.

"And she cried out with a loud voice and said: Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

"And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?

"For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.

"And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord.

"And Mary said: My soul doth magnify the Lord:

"And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

"Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

"Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me: and holy is His name.

"And His mercy is from generation unto generations, to them that fear Him.

"He hath showed might in His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.

"He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble.

"He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich He hath sent empty away.

"He hath received Israel His servant, being mindful of His mercy.

"As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed for ever.

"And Mary abode with her about three months; and she returned to her own house."—*St. Luke* i. 39–56.

WE come now to the Second Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, the Visitation, as it is called; that is, the visit of our Blessed Lady to St. Elizabeth; an incident which to a Catholic seems full, to overflowing, of testimony to the greatness and glory of Mary, and of a distinct Divine sanction to the honour in which we hold her, but in which I think few Protestants are in the habit of seeing any mystery at all. Let us examine its details in order, and, comparing

Scripture with Scripture, see what it really teaches us.

First, we read that "Mary rose up and went into the hill-country with haste," and we are at once arrested by this last phrase, "with haste." It is the one only occasion in the whole of our Lady's life in which such a word or idea is anywhere connected with her. It stands out in striking contrast with the habitual reserve, self-possession, and perfect calm of her life and character. In the Annunciation and the Crucifixion, those two most solemn moments when, if ever, her whole moral being was tried to its very inmost depths of what spirit it was, nothing is more remarkable than the total absence of any manifestation of feeling. What then is the meaning of this announcement, that she "rose up and went with haste"? The mystery of the Incarnation has now been accomplished in her womb; the Holy Ghost has come upon her, and the power of the Most High has overshadowed her; and it is impossible not to attribute this haste to a Divine impulse given by Him Whom she now bears within her. We are irresistibly reminded of those words of the Canticles,* which

* ii. 8.

have been so beautifully interpreted * of the Incarnation, "The voice of my beloved, Behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills;" or again, of those words of the Psalmist,† "He hath set His tabernacle in the sun, and, as a bridegroom coming out of his bed-chamber, He hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way: His going out is from the end of heaven, and His circuit even to the end thereof, and there is no one that can hide himself from His heat;" words which St. Augustine in like manner explains of the same mystery, saying that when the Word was made flesh, God, as a bridegroom uniting to Himself human nature, found a tabernacle in the womb of Mary, whence in due course He came forth, then grew up, taught, suffered, died, rose again, and finally ascended, running the whole course assigned to Him with joy and eagerness, without delay or hesitation. As He drew near to the end of that course, and "they were in the way going up to Jerusalem, Jesus went before them, and the apostles were astonished, and following they were afraid." ‡ They marvelled and were frightened at the haste

* By St. Gregory, St. Bernard, and others.

† xviii. 6–8. ‡ St. Mark x. 32.

with which He went forward to His death. A little later He Himself said, "With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you before I suffer;"* and this desire and eager haste to fulfil the work He had undertaken, which He then expressed in *words*, here (in the mystery of the Visitation) He shows forth in *action*, ere yet the use of words was possible. He has become Incarnate in the Virgin Mary's womb; He has become so, in order that He may redeem sinners: this is the work which His Father has given Him to do; and from the very first moment, He would be "about His Father's business." Already, whilst still a babe unborn, He would begin the deliverance of His brethren from the bondage of Satan, and the first whom He would thus deliver, cleansing him by an act of special grace from the stain of original sin, shall be His own forerunner. He, too, is yet unborn; but bars of flesh and blood, bars of sense, can be no hindrance to the operations of God, of Him Who "reacheth from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly;"† "There is no one that can hide himself from His heat."

Mary, then, rising up, goes with haste, and

* St. Luke xxii. 15. † Wisdom viii. 1.

entering into the house of Zachary, she salutes Elizabeth. "And it came to pass that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb." I suppose it would be impossible for any Christian to doubt but that this movement, thus solemnly recorded by the Holy Spirit for the instruction of the world, was something more than natural. Even if nothing further had ever been said about it, either in the Bible, or by the Bishops and Pastors of the Church, we should all have had the strongest possible conviction that there was some kind of supernatural mystery wrapped up in it, even though we might have been wholly unable to comprehend what it was. But now call to mind what infant this is who thus anticipates the laws of nature, and recognizes the presence of his Lord, and rejoices in it before he is born—for Elizabeth, "full of the Holy Ghost," will tell us presently that *this* is the true cause of what had happened; "the infant in my womb leaped *for joy*." Who is this infant? St. John the Baptist; He of whom it had been foretold* that He "should be filled with the Holy Ghost *even from His mother's womb;*" He who was to go before

* St. Luke i. 15.

the Lord to prepare His way, and who should by-and-by say concerning Jesus and himself, "I am not Christ, but I am sent before Him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth with joy because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled."* Yes, the word is well chosen; this joy is fulfilled, perfected, now that the Bridegroom has come out of His bride-chamber and is running the course of His public ministry; but it had begun years before, it began when as an infant he leaped for joy at hearing that Bridegroom's voice, speaking by the mouth of Mary. For Christ then spoke by the mouth of His Mother, and John heard by the ears of Elizabeth; and the tradition of the Church has always taught that at that moment he was sanctified in his Mother's womb. The Baptist preceded Jesus in the order of his public ministry; but in the order of grace Jesus is before John, as he himself said, "He that shall come after me is preferred before me, because He was before me, and of His fulness we all have received, and grace for grace."† John receives of His fulness now.

* St. John iii. 29. † St. John i. 15.

The first act of the Incarnate Saviour is the sanctification, the preparation of His own forerunner. He has prevented him by His grace, to the end that he may be hereafter enabled to prevent Him in his ministry. St. John receives the first that grace which he is to be the first to announce; and already, as it were, by this leap for joy in his Mother's womb, he gives that witness which he shall one day give by word of mouth, "Behold the Lamb of God, Behold Him who taketh away the sin of the world." * How wonderful is the secret harmony of every part of the Gospel narrative; the words and works of all the chief agents and instruments in its mysteries mutually confirming and explaining one another.

But to proceed with the history before us. No sooner has Mary spoken than "Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Ghost, cries out with a loud voice," as if for this very purpose, that the people of all nations and all ages should hear, and utters words which—one may almost literally say—have never since ceased to be repeated, whose echo has never yet died away, nor ever will die away, so long as the Church endures. She snatches up, as it

* St. John i. 29.

were, the last words which the Angel had brought from heaven, saying, "Blessed art thou among women;" she repeats them, and then adds, "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb;" thus setting the example which the Church has so closely followed ever since, of coupling the praises of Jesus and Mary in the same hymns of thanksgiving. Then, reflecting on her own unworthiness, she exclaims, "Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Remember, that this is the history of the very first fact we know about our Blessed Lady, after the Son of God had "set His tabernacle" within her, and mark the height of dignity to which she has been already exalted. Compare the two figures. Elizabeth well advanced in years, the wife of a priest who had been lately favoured by the visit of an angel from heaven, and herself, too, wonderfully "dealt with by the Lord Who had had regard to take away her reproach among men." She was soon to give birth to a child, of promise and of prophecy, at whose nativity (it had been revealed from God) "many should rejoice," and who was to be "great before the Lord."* Mary, on the other hand, was a young

* St. Luke i. 14, 15.

maiden, espoused to a carpenter. Nevertheless, because she was chosen to be the Mother of Jesus, Elizabeth immediately humbles herself before her, and expresses her deep sense of grateful wonder at the condescension of Mary's visit. "Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" We are reminded of the words of the Royal Psalmist,* in which he cries out to God and asks, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the Son of Man that Thou visitest him?" Or still more forcibly we are reminded of the words of Elizabeth's own son to the Son of Mary, spoken on the banks of the Jordan, when Jesus came from Galilee to John to be baptized by him, "and John stayed Him, saying, I ought to be baptized by thee, and comest Thou to me?" † There is a certain proportion between the mothers and the sons, as might reasonably have been expected, seeing that the dignity both of Mary and Elizabeth is a light reflected from the dignity of their sons; and Elizabeth therefore acknowledges her own immense inferiority in this proportion, as every child of the Catholic Church can never cease to do in the presence of Mary, no matter how exalted his dignity, how

* viii. 5. † St. Matt. iii. 14.

eminent his sanctity, because she is the Queen of Saints and the mother of God.

Mary has told nothing to St. Elizabeth, but the very voice of her salutation has sufficed. Mary is now the temple of the Holy Ghost, filled with His Presence, so that it overflows upon all around. Elizabeth herself is also filled with the Holy Ghost, and under His inspiration gives this testimony to the surpassing greatness of Mary. She also reveals the sign which has been given her of the Divine Presence in Mary, saying those words which we have already considered, "Behold, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy." Finally, she concludes by again pronouncing Mary to be blessed; but this time it is not merely because of the great things that have been done in her, but also because of her own share in the doing of them: "Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord." Doubtless, as she spoke these words, she had present to her mind the words which the angel had spoken to her own husband six months before, and whose effect still continued in the penalty of speechlessness which he was paying

for his unbelief. "Behold thou shalt be dumb and shalt not be able to speak until the day wherein these things shall come to pass, because thou hast not believed my words, which shall be fulfilled in their time."* God's words will be fulfilled, whether those to whom they are addressed believe them or disbelieve them; but belief in them wins an additional blessing besides what may be contained in the words themselves, and disbelief a punishment. The mouth of Zachary shall not be opened, nor his tongue loosed, till St. John the Baptist has been born and named. Mary is blessed, because the Lord is with her, and because Jesus is to be born of her, but she also has another blessing because of her faith. "Blessed art thou that hast believed;" and this blessing it is which reverses the curse brought upon the whole human race by Eve. For, as St. Irenæus says, "the knot of Eve's disobedience received its unloosing through the obedience of Mary; for what Eve, a virgin, bound by incredulity, that Mary, a virgin, unloosed by faith." "Eve had believed the serpent, Mary believed Gabriel," says Tertullian; "the fault which the one committed by believing [the

* St. Luke i. 20.

evil spirit], the other by believing [God] blotted out."

And now Mary herself begins to speak, and she, too, lifts up her voice in such a way that all ages shall hear and repeat her words. They shall fulfil, almost unconsciously, the prophecy she makes about herself, repeating the grateful outpouring of her own heart to God as their favourite hymn of praise to herself. The *Magnificat* is at once the hymn of Mary to the honour and glory of God, and the favourite hymn of the Church in honour of Mary; and this because the greatness and honour of Mary are only a reflection from the greatness and glory of God. She is "fair as the moon," only because she has been "clothed with the sun," and shines with his light. She is great, only because "He that is mighty hath done great things to her;" and the higher those "great things" have raised her above ordinary creatures, the greater are her obligations to God, and the more perfectly does she magnify His name. Her elevation glorifies God more than all other creatures can glorify Him; first, because no other has ever received so much at His hands, and, secondly; because no other ever so entirely and absolutely gave back

to God all that she received. Let us examine the hymn in detail.

St. Elizabeth has addressed to her high words of praise and congratulation for her faith and other graces, and the wonderful privilege by which they have been rewarded. But Mary takes no heed to the praises bestowed upon herself; she does not even address her answer to St. Elizabeth at all; her whole soul is drawn upwards and absorbed in the thought of God, and in the fulness of her heart she bursts forth into an acknowledgment of her debt and gratitude to Him, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." In one sense, indeed, "the heavens and all the works of God's hands" praise and magnify the Lord; for they "show forth His glory."* But they do this irrationally, and only as the servile echo of God's own voice; they have no consciousness of their own beauty—no sense of the benefit of their own existence—no knowledge of what they owe to God, and cannot, therefore, offer Him "a reasonable service."† It is only in man that they find thought, a heart, a voice; he sees their goodness and beauty, and, "understanding by the things that are made,

* Ps. xviii. 2. † Rom. xii. 1.

the invisible things of Him who made them,"* he can praise and worship Him, and give Him thanks. But even his praise and worship must depend upon the gifts which he has first received from God, and in proportion to those gifts will be the measure of the glory he can bestow. God must first magnify us, and then we can magnify Him. Mary, therefore, being now exalted above all other creatures, pours forth the noblest hymn of praise to "magnify the Lord" that any child of Adam ever sang. God "hath done great things to her;" and, as some bright and powerful reflector, whose smooth and polished surface, free from every stain of rust, or flaw of inequality, gathers into itself all light, only that it may give it back again with greater brilliance and perfection, so the pure soul of Mary, flooded with "every best and perfect gift come down from the Father of Lights," † pours itself forth in this magnificent doxology, *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*,—"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." Observe, she does not speak of God by any of those titles which would express His

* Rom. i. 20. † St. James i. 17.

newly-created and more intimate relations with herself, but only by those which belonged to her in common with the rest of mankind. God was now her Son; she bore Him in her womb. She had been made, too, in an especial sense, the Spouse of God. Yet she is still the same humble "handmaid of *the Lord*" as she was before, and she rejoices in God "her *Saviour*," thereby proclaiming that truth which the Church has never ceased to teach,* that whatever gifts and privileges might have been bestowed upon her, they were all entirely due to the merits of the passion and death of her own Son. For in herself she is nothing, and has nothing; and it was her deep consciousness and hearty acknowledgment of this truth which won for her the special regard of God: "He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid."

* These words, "my Saviour," have been often insisted upon as a conclusive argument against the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Would that men would try to understand our doctrines before they undertake to refute them! The very collect which the Church appoints to be used for the feast of the Immaculate Conception contains these words:—"Thou who, through the merits of the death of thy Son foreseen, didst preserve the Blessed Virgin from all stain."

But, though so lowly and abject in herself, she knows full well the dignity to which God's grace has raised her, and she foretells its consequences. "He that is mighty hath done great things to me;" "He hath showed might in His arm." Here is the measure of the greatness of Mary, viz., the things that have been done to her, and these are so great that Mary herself cannot describe them; she only gives them this very name, and calls them *great things;* great, and done by Him that is mighty, who, moreover, put forth for their accomplishment the whole might of His arm. Holy Scripture, accommodating itself to the language and thoughts of men, speaks at various times of the finger, the hand, and the arm of God, denoting thereby different degrees of the exercise of His power; and for this, the greatest work which the created world could ever see, there was required (if I may so speak) the whole power of His arm. What an immeasurable idea of Mary's greatness do not these words suggest to us! and yet, in truth, no words that human tongue can utter can ever come up to the simple reality of the case. Try to imagine for a moment that you do not know what God has done for Mary; that you only

know her description of it, or rather the few words she here uses in speaking of it. You know that it is something very great, done by Him Who is Greatness and Power itself, Who has put forth all the strength of His arm to do it. Build upon these few but pregnant words all that you think they could be made to bear, all the conjectures that the boldest imagination could devise. Run over in your mind all the richest and noblest gifts of creation, all the treasures of grace and degrees of glory. Heap gift upon gift, greatness upon greatness, privilege upon privilege. Call to mind all that you have ever heard or read of the greatest saints, of confessors and martyrs, of virgins and apostles, of patriarchs and prophets, and of the very angels and archangels, the cherubim and seraphim themselves. Add these all together, make but one greatness, one privilege, one dignity of the whole, and confer it upon the Blessed Virgin. Will it not after all fall short of that title and dignity which is undeniably hers, that she was made the Mother of God?

When St. Paul, writing to the Hebrews,* wished to express the greatness of Jesus Christ,

* i. 4, 5.

he said of Him that He was "made so much better than the angels, as He hath inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels hath He said at any time, Thou art my Son?" And we, too, wishing to express the greatness of Mary, may ask, "To which of the angels hath God said at any time, Thou art my Mother?" But to Mary it had just now been said by God's own messenger, an angel sent from heaven for the very purpose of making this announcement, "The Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." If we try to bring home to ourselves all that is contained in these words, truly we cannot wonder that Mary's "spirit should have rejoiced in God her Saviour," nor at the prophecy she makes concerning herself, "Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." For no matter what might happen in any future ages of the world to the end of time, nothing could ever blot out the memory of this "great thing" which had now been done to her—nothing could ever eclipse the brightness of this high and incommunicable privilege. Times and seasons might succeed one another in ceaseless change; empires might rise and fall; the manners and

customs of men, their social and political institutions might be reformed, upset, and created anew; but so long as the world should last, it was impossible that anything should happen so wonderful as this union of the Creator with the creature, and impossible but that the privileged creature in whom this union was effected should be for ever accounted blessed. "Behold, all generations shall call me blessed." And all generations have so called her; all, at least, within the pale of the Church, until at length it has come to be a part of her very name, which is seldom or never used without this prefix, "the Blessed Virgin." What St. Ildephonsus said many centuries ago may be repeated with still greater emphasis to-day—"Look abroad throughout the whole world, wheresoever the sun shines, and see if there be any nation or people among whom are no believers in Christ, and wheresoever Christ is confessed and worshipped, there the venerable Mary, Mother of God, is proclaimed as blessed. By the whole world, and in every tongue, is Mary blessed; all mankind are witnesses to the truth of this prophecy: she alone foretold it, all mankind is accomplishing it."

But the prophecy of Mary goes beyond what is merely personal to herself. After having poured forth her gratitude, published her greatness, and foretold her glory, she next draws a rapid but very striking picture of one of the great characteristics of God's work which was now begun, the moral revolution which Christianity should effect throughout the whole world. "He hath showed might in His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away." It is impossible, in reading this part of Mary's hymn, not to be struck with its close resemblance to the canticle of Anna, the mother of Samuel, sung more than a thousand years before. Some few passages in the one seem almost taken from the other; at any rate the same general sentiment pervades both. "The bow of the mighty is overcome, and the weak are girt with strength. They that were full before have hired out themselves for bread, and the hungry are filled, so that the barren hath borne many, and she that had many children is weakened. The Lord killeth and maketh alive;

He bringeth down to hell, and bringeth back again. The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich; He humbleth and He exalteth. He raiseth up the needy from the dust and lifteth up the poor from the dunghill, that he may sit with princes and hold the throne of glory."* The explanation of this close resemblance between the songs of Anna and Mary is easy. They are in truth the same canticle, ever new yet ever old; the hymn of grateful thanksgiving, sung to commemorate the triumph of God over His enemies by means of some feeble instrument, whose very weakness only serves to show forth more strikingly His power. The heart of Anna "rejoiced in the Lord," because "her mouth was enlarged over her enemies," because God had "looked down on the affliction of His servant and been mindful of her" and taken away her reproach, and she had borne a man-child, who was given to the Lord all the days of his life, and who was a type of Jesus in his threefold character of Prophet, Priest, and King. Mary rejoiced, because she recognized in what had happened to herself the accomplishment of that divine purpose announced to Abraham and to the first parents

* 1 Kings ii. 4–8.

of the human family, and whose fruits should continue to the very end of the world. She concluded, therefore, this wonderful hymn by a brief summary of the whole history of religion: "God hath received Israel His servant, being mindful of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed for ever."

Thus does the Blessed Virgin sing of the mystery of the Incarnation, in accents which seem to indicate a most complete knowledge both of itself and of its consequences; she blesses and praises God for all His benefits to herself, to the children of Israel, and to the world. She shows her consciousness of her own greatness without doing violence to her humility, which consists not in suppressing but in publishing the great things that have been done to her, as a testimony to the power and mercy of God. She announces by anticipation, and as it were invites, the homage of the whole Christian world, and the honour and devotion with which we celebrate her praises finds its complete justification in her own prophecy.

It is a hymn of wonderful beauty and grandeur in itself, but our appreciation of its merits is still further enhanced when we call to mind

the character and position of its author. It would have excited our admiration as the song of Debora, of Judith, or of any other of those heroines whose manly courage was sufficiently displayed by their actions; but it fills us with amazement, when we consider that it was the song of a humble maiden of Israel, "the handmaid of the Lord," thus suddenly raised from the lowest obscurity to be the most highly exalted amongst women, and the nearest to the throne of God. She sang it, and then remained for ever silent. O wonderful silence of a mouth that could speak so well! O divine humility, enlightened by such superhuman wisdom! Had Mary never spoken, we might have doubted whether she had any knowledge or understanding of her position in the world's history; but the revelation of herself which she makes in the *Magnificat* gives a new meaning and value to everything else which the Holy Spirit may have recorded of her.

LECTURE VII.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE CHILD JESUS IN THE TEMPLE.

"And after the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they carried him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord.

"As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male opening the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.

"And to offer a sacrifice according as it is written in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons.

"And behold there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was in him.

"And he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Christ of the Lord.

"And he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when his parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law,

"He also took him in his arms, and blessed God, and said:

"Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace.

"Because my eyes have seen thy salvation,

"Which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples:

"A light to the revelation of the gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

"And his father and mother were wondering at those things, which were spoken concerning him.

"And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother: Behold this child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted.

"And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed."—*St. Luke* ii. 22–35.

THE Gospels tell us nothing about the Blessed Virgin after her return from the house of St. Elizabeth to her own, until her going up to Bethlehem to be enrolled with St. Joseph; and "when she was there, it came to pass that her days were accomplished that she should be delivered, and she brought forth her son" Jesus. Here, too, Holy Scripture only records the facts with brief simplicity, and leaves us to meditate within ourselves as to the thoughts and feelings of Mary at that supreme moment; the depth of her self-abasement, the overflowing fulness of her

love and the unutterableness of her joy, as first she gazed on the newborn Infant Who was at once her Son and her God.

One only observation of the Evangelists respecting our Blessed Lady's conduct at this time must not be overlooked. We are indebted for it (as usual) to St. Luke. He tells us that when the shepherds, warned by the angels, came to Bethlehem "to see the word which the Lord had showed to them, they found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger." Then they understood and believed all that the angels had told them, and they announced to those who were present all that they had seen and heard that night as they were keeping watch over their flocks in the fields; and all that heard wondered; but (the inspired writer adds with deep significance) "Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart." Observe the care with which he distinguishes the Blessed Virgin from all the other inhabitants or visitors of Bethlehem on that first Christmas night; how emphatically he bears testimony to her higher gift of knowledge. She is silent, indeed, like the rest, or rather, she is more silent than the rest; but whereas they are lost in wonder, she alone of all the assistants at

that scene, really understanding the mystery that has been accomplished, faithfully treasures up all that is said. Her silence amid these amazing solemnities is not the fruit of indifference or unconsciousness; the very words of the Evangelist exclude such a misinterpretation of her conduct, and it is still more pointedly contradicted by the triumphant and prophetic hymn which she had already sung in the mystery of the Visitation. *Then*, as we have seen, she was fully conscious of her Son's dignity and of the fulfilment in herself of all the promises which had been made to Abraham and his seed for ever, and she proclaimed aloud that in consequence of the great things which had been done to her by Him that is mighty, all generations should from henceforth call her Blessed. The indwelling within her sacred womb, for nine months since the utterance of that hymn, of the very Wisdom of God Incarnate, has not darkened her understanding and weakened her apprehension of the truth. Rather, her whole mind and soul have been more and more divinely illuminated, and she has become completely wrapt up in, identified with the mystery which she bore within her; her heart is too full for words. "She *kept* all the words, pondering them in

her heart," meditating, digesting, comparing them one with another, till the time should come when she should bring them forth for the instruction of the Church and the world. She was silent, because she listened to the Divine Word speaking within her, and to those who gave testimony to Him from without; she was silent, because she was absorbed in love and adoration. And if that other Mary was privileged to receive a special blessing from Jesus as having "chosen the best part," because she sat in silence at His feet "hearing His word," how could it fail to have been a most faithful source of benediction to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, that she, too, kept silence, and meditated, and treasured up in her heart the hymn that the angels had sung, and the words they had spoken about the Child that had been born that night?

Moreover, whilst considering the period of Christ's infancy, it is important to observe that it was His good pleasure that Mary should be set forth in the Gospels side by side with Himself, and that He should receive during this time, whilst still inseparably connected with her, some of the strongest and most striking testimonies to His Divinity that were given during the whole

course of His mortal life. Not only was it proclaimed by the angels from Heaven to the shepherds, the first-fruits of the Jewish nation, but, as we learn from another Evangelist, the first-fruits of the Gentile world also, "the wise men from the East," publicly acknowledged it, ere yet He had been removed from the place of His Birth. Guided by the star and entering into the house where the Child was, "they found Him with Mary His Mother, and falling down they adored Him." It was one of the privileges and blessings of Mary, that her Son chose thus to manifest Himself under conditions which of necessity manifested her also. Her lap was the throne whereon He would receive the first homage and adoration which was to be paid by those whom He had come to save.

He might, if He had so willed, have entered into this world in some other way, and begun His human life at mature age. He need have known nothing of the feebleness of infancy; or, knowing and experiencing it, He might have left us in ignorance of all the details of that part of His life, as we are actually left in ignorance of other parts which we might deem of equal or greater importance. But on the contrary, He

willed both to be born of a Mother, to be nursed at her breasts, and to receive from her hands all those minute and tender offices which belong to that closest and most sacred of human relationships, and also that men should see Him in this condition and should pay Him their earliest acts of worship whilst yet He remained in it, that so a deep sense of Mary's privileges and dignity might be impressed on all hearts from the beginning. For surely all who saw Him thus voluntarily dependent on a Mother's care, and who at the same time (like holy Simeon and Anna) knew by a special illumination of their souls by the Holy Spirit Who He was, must have been lost in wonder and admiration at the greatness of her privileges. And she herself, from whom none of these things were hid, would not have neglected, but rather would have availed herself to the very utmost of all those treasures of grace which her extraordinary proximity to God had placed within her reach. We know from the subsequent history of His life that the very touch of Jesus sufficed to communicate graces to those who touched Him worthily. Who then shall count or measure the graces which Mary drew from Him during the nine months in which He lay in Her

sacred womb, and throughout all the years of His infancy and childhood?

This is a train of thought, however, which must be left to the pious imagination of the faithful; for ourselves, we must pass on to the Presentation of the Divine Infant in the Temple, an incident which has been recorded with great minuteness, and which, therefore, contains much that requires our notice with regard to our Blessed Lady.

It was a part of the Mosaic law that women should be accounted unclean for a certain number of days after childbirth, during which period the newly-made mother was forbidden to touch any holy thing or to enter into the sanctuary. When the appointed days were fulfilled, she was required to bring to the door of the tabernacle of the testimony two offerings for sacrifice, the one for a holocaust, the other for sin. These the priest was to offer before the Lord, and at the same time to pray for the mother, who was thereby cleansed from the ceremonial impurity under which she had been labouring, and once more restored to the free enjoyment of all religious privileges. The words of this law, as written in Leviticus,* seem

* c. xii.

clearly to confine its obligation to those women who had conceived and borne children in the ordinary way; and as Mary was in this respect a solitary exception among mothers, so was she the only one really exempt from this law of purification. Nevertheless she would not claim this exemption. Like her Divine Son, and because she was animated by the same sentiments as He was, she would "fulfil all justice."* He was baptized with "the baptism of penance," as though He stood in need of "remission of sins;" † she was cleansed, as though she had been once unclean. And again, in the course of His public ministry, Jesus instructed His disciple Peter that He was really free from all obligation to pay the ordinary tribute,‡ which was paid by the rest of the children of Israel for the support of the temple; nevertheless that "He might not scandalize them," He paid it, providing the means of doing so by a secret exercise of His Divine Power. Just so, Mary too submits to this general law of Purification from which she is really free, lest she should otherwise "scandalize," by a premature discovery of the secret entrusted to her

* St. Matt. iii. 15. † St. Mark i. 4.
‡ St. Matt. xvii. 25.

keeping; and though she is Purity itself, and He who has been born of her is "the Holy," nevertheless, "after the days of her purification were accomplished," she goes up to Jerusalem to be cleansed and to offer the sacrifice that was enjoined by the law of the Lord.

This sacrifice varied according to the wealth of the parents; if they could afford it, the mother was required to offer a lamb of a year old for the holocaust, "and a young pigeon or a turtle for sin; but if her hand found not sufficiency," and she was not able to offer a lamb, then *both* the offerings might be young pigeons or turtles. Mary was come to "present to the Lord" the true Lamb of God, the ransom of the world, of Whose sacrifice upon the cross those other lambs had been only prophetic figures; but though He was the Lord of heaven and earth, He had "become poor for our sakes," * and His Mother was the wife of a poor artisan, and therefore she made the offering which was commanded to the poor; thus setting us an example in one act both of perfect obedience and of true humility.

There is nothing beyond the exercise of these virtues by our Blessed Lady in a very eminent

* 2 Cor. viii. 9.

degree which calls for any special notice in the ceremonies of the Purification hitherto described; but a third ceremony which yet remains to be spoken of is full of mystery, and though at first sight it may seem principally to belong to the Child, a closer examination of the details will show that here, as elsewhere, great light is reflected from the Child upon the Mother.

We read in the book of Exodus* that the Lord commanded Moses, and Moses communicated the Divine command to the people, that in memory of their deliverance out of Egypt and out of the house of bondage, "every first-born that openeth the womb among the children of Israel should be sanctified unto the Lord, for they are all His." "For when Pharao was hardened and would not let us go"—thus were they instructed to say to one another, father to son, handing on the tradition of the law and its motive,—"the Lord slew every first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of man to the first-born of beasts; therefore, I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the womb of the male sex, and all the first-born of my sons I redeem" with a price; which price

* c. xiii.

we elsewhere* learn was "five sicles of silver, by the weight of the sanctuary." It would appear then that this offering to God of the first-born rested on a double foundation; the one general or universal, applicable to all mankind, the other belonging to the children of Israel in particular. The first-born were to be offered to God, just as the first fruits of the earth were offered, viz., as an acknowledgment that "all things are His," and that we have no right or title to the use of anything excepting only from His bounty; but they were to be offered also in memory of that signal mercy which God had bestowed upon the Israelites when He delivered them out of the hands of Pharao by "slaying every first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharao who sat on his throne unto the first-born of the captive woman that was in the prison, and all the first-born of cattle,"† but among the children of Israel there died not one. Christ, therefore, was offered, "sanctified," to the Lord for a double reason; viz., as "the first-born of every creature,"‡ and as "the first-born son of Mary." § In Him we are all sanctified, according to that which He

* Numbers xviii. 16. † Exod. xii. 29.
‡ Coloss. i. 15. § St. Matt. i. 25.

Himself said, "for them do I sanctify Myself." * He came to take the place of all the victims and sacrifices that had been offered since the world began, as the Prophets had foretold and the Apostles testify concerning Him. "Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldest not; but a body Thou hast fitted to me. Holocausts for sin did not please Thee; then said I, Behold I come." † That body has now been prepared for Him, formed by the operation of the Holy Ghost in the womb of Mary. The Word has been made flesh, and He has now "come," and at once the offering is made; this is the first step, so to speak, in the ascent of Mount Calvary; it is the preface and the pledge of the Passion.

And as Jesus began in this mystery His Passion, so too did Mary her Dolours. We reckon the Presentation indeed among the joyful mysteries of the Rosary; but through the prophecy of Simeon it also fittingly finds its place among the Dolours of Mary. For this Presentation of her Son to God was not to Mary what the presentation of a child at the font of Baptism is to an ordinary Christian mother, neither was it a merely

* John xvii. 19; cf. Heb. x. 10.
† Psalm xxxix. 8; Heb. x. 5, 6.

formal ceremony, as it might have been to an ordinary Jewish mother. It cost her more than the few coins which the law exacted; it partook of the nature of Abraham's sacrifice, when in obedience to God's commands he "took his only begotten son Isaac whom he loved, and went into the land of vision to offer him for an holocaust." Even had the whole scene passed without a single witness beyond the principal and necessary actors, had no word of prophecy been spoken, but all been done in the most quiet unimpressive manner, as a mere matter of routine repeated every day for each first-born child that was brought, still we might have been sure that a heart so thoughtful and meditative as Mary's could not have been idle at such a solemn moment. She was not insensible to the true meaning of the act she was performing. St. Paul teaches us that everything in the Old Law had its true fulfilment in the Life and Death of our Blessed Lord, and in His mystical Body the Church; and although the great majority of the Jews, a gross and carnal people, may never have been solicitous to penetrate beneath the surface of their religious worship, yet there must always have been some privileged souls, interiorly illu-

minated by Divine grace, to pierce through the clouds and shadows of the outward letter, and to drink deeply of the inward spirit; and such a soul, above all others, was Mary's. No Christian imagines that our Blessed Lady was less "just and devout" than holy Simeon, or doubts but that she, like him, had long been waiting for the consolation of Israel; "looking for its redemption," like Anna the prophetess and those to whom she spoke. Moreover, she had been instructed in the mystery of the Incarnation by a messenger from heaven, and was privy to all its secrets in a way that no other created being could be, for she was the tabernacle in which they had been wrought. She knew that her Son was "to reign in the house of Jacob for ever," but she knew also that "His name was called Jesus, because He should save His people from their sins,"* and she knew the cost at which this salvation was to be purchased. For we cannot suppose that she was as one of those whom Christ rebuked as "foolish and slow of heart to believe in all things which the prophets had spoken, and who knew not therefore that Christ must needs suffer and so enter into His glory."†

* St. Matt. i. 21. † St. Luke xxiv. 25.

On the contrary, our natural instincts seem to constrain us to believe that, like Timothy,* she had "from her infancy known the Holy Scriptures which would instruct her to salvation;" and at any rate it was quite impossible that she who kept so carefully and pondered in her heart the words of the shepherds, should have been less careful and diligent in meditating upon the inspired words of the Prophets and the announcement of the Angel. It is no extravagant assumption, then, but the reasonable conclusion of every thoughtful and reverent mind, that this ceremony of the Presentation in the Temple was to our Blessed Lady, as it certainly was to her Divine Son, a foreshadowing of, and a preparation for, His Passion and Death.

But in truth we are not left to our own speculations upon this subject: there is much in the sequel of this incident as recorded in the Gospel to throw light upon its hidden meaning and the thoughts and feelings of our Blessed Lady. We have said that this was, as it were, the first act in the redemption of the world; Christ came to redeem all mankind; all things

* 2 Tim. iii. 15.

were to be re-established in Him;* in Him there is neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus;† and He would give a foretaste and figure of this universal redemption, by gathering around His very cradle the first-fruits of all ages, sexes, states and conditions of life. Infants did him homage in St. John the Baptist yet unborn, and in the unconscious martyrdom of the Holy Innocents; old age comes to salute Him to-day at the Presentation in the Temple, in holy Simeon and in Anna; in kings and shepherds, the highest and the lowest have already paid Him tribute. The holy state of matrimony has been privileged to acknowledge and proclaim him, in St. Elizabeth and Zachary; the holier state of virginity had from the first been brought still nearer to Him in His spotless Mother, and to-day the reverend state of widowhood is worthily represented by "Anna, a prophetess, who was advanced in years, and had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and was a widow until fourscore and four years; who departed not from the temple, by fastings and prayers serving night and day."

* Eph. i. 10. † Gal. iii. 28; Col. iii. 11.

We need not, however, speak of all of those who took part in the ceremony of to-day: we will speak only of Simeon, "a just and devout man, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was in him; and he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. And he came by the spirit into the temple. And when His parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he also took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace, because mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples; a light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel! And His father and mother were wondering at these things which were spoken concerning Him."

Here we must interrupt the narrative, not to comment upon the beautiful canticle we have recited, whose figurative language about our blessed Lord as the light of the world only repeats what had been "spoken before by the mouth of His holy prophets from the beginning," and especially by the evangelical prophet Isaias,*

* ix. 2; xlii. 6; xlix. 6; lx. 1—3.

but to make a remark upon what is said about our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph, that they "*wondered* at the things which were spoken." This word "wonder" is not always to be understood in its ordinary acceptation, as denoting "the effect of novelty upon ignorance;" otherwise it could never have been used of our Blessed Lord, for example, of whom nevertheless we read that He wondered at the unbelief of the people of Nazareth, and, again, at the faith of the centurion.* Neither can it be so understood of our Blessed Lady in this place; for in fact Simeon had spoken nothing that was really new to her, nothing of which she can be said to have been ignorant. It has been suggested, therefore, that Her wonder may have been excited at finding that the secret entrusted to herself was revealed also to him, or again at his publishing it to others even under the veil of metaphorical language in the *Nunc Dimittis:* the interpretation, however, of one of the Greek Fathers,† commenting upon this passage, seems preferable, where he observes that the knowledge of great and mysterious things renews the sense of wonder in the mind as often as they are again

* St. Mark vi. 6; St. Matt. viii. 10.

† Apud St. Thom., Aurea Catena in loc.

brought before it; for this was precisely what was happening to Mary on the present occasion. She had known for ten months past the blessed mystery now revealed to Simeon. She had "seen with her eyes, she had looked upon, and her hands had handled" the Word of Life for forty days before it was given to Simeon to do the same; and his hymn, therefore, the natural outpouring of his own gratitude and a testimony to as many as stood by, taught her no new truth, but it set the truth before her afresh; it quickened her apprehension of the "great things" that had been done in her, and recalled the feelings of her heart when first they had been announced by the angel in Nazareth, or when the Annunciation had been fulfilled by the Nativity in Bethlehem.

The sacred narrative goes on to say that "Simeon blessed them," and said to Mary alone, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed." It has been well said of this prophecy, delivered so immediately after the birth of Jesus, and fulfilled not only in

His natural Body during His whole life upon earth, but also in His mystical Body the Church in every age from that day to this, that it is of itself a convincing proof of the Divine origin of Christianity. It is not, however, in this point of view that we have now to look at it, but only in that part which affects Mary. And surely the most prejudiced student of Holy Writ must needs confess that she is here united with her Divine Son in the most intimate and unlooked-for manner. She seems to be made the one solitary partner of His lot; singled out to share with Him in the sharp sorrow of these contradictions, and also—for so runs the prophecy—in their fruits, viz.: "that out of many hearts thoughts shall be revealed." These last words certainly seem to be attributed by the inspired prophet to the Mother no less than to the Son. There is some difficulty, no doubt, as to the exact interpretation of them; but it does not seem possible to deny to Mary at least some share in their meaning, and I cannot see how less can justly be concluded from them than that which has here been stated, and which the history both of the Gospel and the Church so abundantly confirm, viz., that the names of

Jesus and Mary are inseparably united in the rise and progress of Christianity.

I know that there is another way of taking this passage, by which the words, "Yea, and a sword shall pass through thine own soul," are made a parenthesis, and the words "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" are made to depend upon what preceded, and to refer only to the Son. But certainly this is not the obvious reading of the text; it wrests the words from the order in which they are, only because it is not easy to understand how the sufferings of Mary were to reveal the thoughts of men's hearts. We acknowledge the difficulty, but do not like to do this violence to the text in order to escape from it; nor does it seem necessary that we should. The sufferings of Mary and the contradictions of Jesus reached their climax both at the same time, viz., when He was nailed to the cross on Calvary. That was most emphatically "the sign which shall be contradicted;" it was "to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Gentiles foolishness," and Mary was never separated from the cross. She alone seems fully to have appreciated its power, whilst suffering most keenly from its bitterness. Even

the faith of the apostles could not stand the trial of the whole Passion throughout; at one time or another "they all forsook Him and fled." But though the sword of grief transfixed the soul of Mary, she stood at the foot of the cross. And from that day to this, whatever contradictions Christian doctrine has been exposed to, Mary has had her share in them; whatever heresies may have attacked the natures or the person of Christ, have always attacked also, more or less directly, the dignity, privileges, or power of Mary. Nor did the early Fathers of the Church find any surer mode of guarding the true doctrine about Jesus than by defining carefully the titles and privileges of His Mother. And in these later days, the inseparable union of the Mother and the Son has been still more strikingly demonstrated by the experience of many of the Reformed Churches (as they are called) upon the Continent, and, I fear we must add, by the real condition of religious opinion among the great mass of our own Protestant fellow-countrymen. Catholics, who have always honoured the Mother, still confess, adore, and worship the Son; while those who, whether secretly or openly, have ceased to confess Jesus as very God, began

by scoffing at Mary as the Mother of God. Mary, then, and Jesus are thus intima united in the history of our Redemption in Christian doctrine, is it strange that t should be united also in Christian devoti And is there not occasion to ask whether ha this part of the prophecy of Simeon may even now be unconsciously fulfilled by som those who take offence "in the thoughts of th hearts" at Catholic devotion to the Bles Virgin? The love of Mary is a proof of love of Christ, and it cannot exist without c passion for her bitter sorrows, which compass if faithfully cherished, will prove a source great and innumerable graces. Let those, th who are conscious to themselves that they ne give a thought either to her dolours or her j see to it what token they have of any share the Resurrection provided by the Child.

One word more about our Blessed Lad demeanour on this occasion of the Presentati and then we will end our comment upon the cumstances of this mystery. We read that w Simeon's prophecy was ended, and Anna, t had confessed to the Lord, Joseph and Ma "having performed all things according to law of the Lord, returned into Galilee, i

their city Nazareth." Mark the unruffled self-possession and perfect resignation of Mary in her still unbroken silence. Others around her are prophesying and confessing of the greatness and glories of her Son; she calmly and diligently fulfils all that the law required, as though He were an ordinary child; redeeming, according to the terms of the Mosaic ritual, Him who was in truth the world's Redeemer, even as she had herself submitted to be purified, though perfect purity. Then she is told of a sword that is to pierce her own soul, and by the very vagueness of the prophecy its terrors are indefinitely increased; yet she asks no question, nor seeks for more light than God has been pleased to give her. She simply accepts the intimation of His will in the terms in which His messenger makes it, and with this she is content: "her strength is in silence and hope,"* so sublimely peaceful that men might almost mistake it for ignorance and insensibility, did they not see that in the end, when the sword really comes on Mount Calvary, she receives it with the same perfect tranquillity —the same invincible might, of a will wholly resigned and identified with the will of God.

* Isaias xxx. 15.

LECTURE VIII.

THE FINDING OF OUR BLESSED LORD IN THE TEMPLE.

"When Jesus was twelve years old, they going up into Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast,

"And having fulfilled the days, when they returned, the child Jesus remained in Jerusalem, and his parents knew it not.

"And thinking that He was in the company, they came a day's journey, and sought Him among their kinsfolks and acquaintance.

"And not finding Him, they returned into Jerusalem, seeking Him.

"And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the Temple sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions.

"And all that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom and His answers.

"And seeing Him they wondered. And His mother said to Him: Son, why hast thou done so to us? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

"And He said to them: How is it that you sought me? did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?

"And they understood not the word that He spoke unto them.

"And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth and was subject to them. And His mother kept all these words in her heart.

"And Jesus advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and men."—*St. Luke* ii. 41—52.

THE prophecies of holy Simeon both as to the contradictions which awaited the infant Jesus and the sword which should pierce the Mother's soul, soon received their first fulfilment. An angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, bidding him arise and take the Child and His mother and fly into Egypt, because Herod would seek the Child to destroy Him. "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias the prophet, saying, 'A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning; Rachel bewailing her children and would not be comforted, because they are not.'"* And though Mary's child was saved, yet we may be sure that this mother most amiable could not have heard without the deepest emotion of the sufferings of so

* St. Matt. ii. 17, 18.

many other parents, of whose cruel bereavement her own Infant had been the innocent occasion. If we were endeavouring to set before you a complete history of our Blessed Lady, it would be necessary that we should here inquire how far the sorrow of her tender sympathizing heart at the thought of these bereaved mothers was mitigated by any knowledge she may have had that the massacre of the Holy Innocents had been to themselves at least an exceeding great gain, because her Divine Son, for whom their lives had been sacrificed, could not fail to give them an abundant recompense. This, however, as well as many other interesting questions connected with the history of our Blessed Lady's thoughts and feelings during this period of her Son's life cannot enter into our present plan, which, as I have so often reminded you, only allows me to speak of those incidents in the Gospel in which some word or deed of Mary, or of others having reference to her, seems to have an important bearing on the honour in which Catholics hold her.

For the same reason, I forbear to enter upon any examination of the details of the flight into Egypt, or of the sojourn of the Holy Family in

that heathen land, though much might be said upon the trial of Mary's faith and the perfection of her obedience in this hasty flight and long exile, commanded by a messenger from Heaven to shield a Divine Infant from the jealous hate of a tyrant king, His creature.

On their return to Nazareth after the death of Herod, we read that "the child grew and waxed strong, full of wisdom; and the grace of God was in Him." He was "full of wisdom," because He was wisdom itself, the eternal wisdom of the Father; "the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world;" and yet the same Evangelist presently adds, that "Jesus advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men:" that is to say, He manifested His wisdom more and more, daily, in due proportion to His material growth and age, that so in all things He might be seen to be "like as we are, only without sin."* He was full of wisdom as a child, as a man, and at all times; but in the age of childhood He shewed Himself as a perfect child, and in manhood as a perfect man. Once, however, during the days of His youth, He made a manifestation of wisdom beyond His years

* Heb. iv. 15.

under circumstances which must be examined more attentively because of the share His mother had in them.

We read that Joseph and Mary "went every year to Jerusalem, at the solemn day of the pasch." Such was their faith and obedience, their humility and simplicity, that though conscious to themselves that Christ, the true Pasch, was now come and in their own keeping, nevertheless they would not dispense themselves from the obligation of still observing the old figures of the law which "could never make the comers thereunto perfect." * They went therefore to the Holy City as often as the law required, in company with their pious neighbours, differing in nothing outwardly from the rest, but both themselves and the Divine Child mixing in familiar intercourse with those around them, "hid in the deep disguise of common life."

Nothing, perhaps, in the whole range of the Gospel History is more truly wonderful to a thoughtful mind than this complete annihilation before the eyes of men of the divinity of Jesus during the period of His infancy, and, indeed, up to the moment of His manifestation to Israel

* Heb. x. 1.

by the preaching and miracles of His public ministry. St. John the Baptist had from the first lived apart from men; he was "in the deserts," and he led the life of an ascetic and a recluse; "he had his garment of camels' hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins, and his meat was locusts and wild honey." Thus he was always distinguished from the rest of mankind; the way was smoothed for him, as it were, and for the opening of his special mission as the forerunner of Christ, by the reverence and awe with which this austere mode of life invested him, in public opinion, even before he had begun to speak. But it is clear from a number of incidental notices in the Gospels that in our Blessed Lord there was an entire absence of anything of this kind. When he had become famous, people asked one another who He was and whence He came. "How came this man by this wisdom and miracles? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brethren and sisters, are they not all with us? Whence, therefore, hath He all these things?"* Nay, have we not known Him working Himself at a mechanic's trade? "Is not this the carpenter,

* St. Matt. xiii. 56.

the son of Mary?"* They tried to call to mind whether He had ever been at school or no: "How doth this man know letters, having never learned?" † He had been brought up, so far as they knew, like other boys of His age and circumstances. Even after His public ministry had begun, they found Him eating and drinking like other men, and they were scandalized at it; it seemed so inconsistent with the claims of a higher kind, set forth in His teachings and by the miraculous cures which He wrought. However, up to the age of thirty, there was not even so much as this; there was scarcely a single claim to distinguish Him. He was (if I may so speak) buried and lost sight of in the crowd. And this truth is brought home to us in a very striking manner by the incident we have now to consider.

"When Jesus was twelve years old, His parents went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast; and having fulfilled the days, when they returned, the child Jesus remained in Jerusalem, and His parents knew it not. And thinking that He was in the company, they came a day's journey, and sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance; and not finding Him,

* St. Mark vi. 3. † St. John vii. 15.

they returned into Jerusalem, seeking Him." What a wonderful picture of unpretending simplicity! The mother of the Son of God, and His foster-father, conscious of the treasure they possess, yet so far from looking upon that treasure as their own exclusive property and assuming to themselves any superiority over others in consequence of the dignity which had been conferred upon them, that they simply accept the charge and fulfil its duties, with care indeed and diligence, but without scrupulosity, allowing the Holy Child a certain liberty and independence of action at one time, and interfering with it at another, just as any prudent and religious-minded parent might have done to his own son under similar circumstances! It is probable that Joseph and Mary began their homeward journey in different groups of the company; if, as Venerable Bede tells us, men and women used to travel separately on these occasions, and the children go indifferently with either. Each, then, might naturally have supposed that Jesus was with the other, and we can easily account for their not having discovered their loss until the evening. They had already gone a day's journey from Jerusalem; but now they retrace their steps with anxious

haste, and we may suppose that they arrived in the Holy City on the following afternoon. Then on the morning of the third day, "they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom and His answers. And seeing Him, they wondered. And His mother said to Him: Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing."

Observe here, too, the extreme naturalness of the narrative, so far as Mary is concerned. First, both her husband and herself wonder at what they see; it is so unlike anything they had observed in Jesus before, that they were not prepared for so sudden a manifestation of the hidden treasures of His wisdom, and they are wrapt in admiration. Nevertheless Mary—for she is His Mother, and it belongs to her therefore more strictly than to St. Joseph to be the first to speak; and doubtless also her greater love would prompt her to speak more quickly—Mary immediately addresses to Him words of loving expostulation which serve to illustrate and establish beyond all question the true character of the relation which had hitherto existed

between them. It is clear that Mary had been accustomed to exercise over Him the full authority of a parent over her child; and though His answer at this moment has been misunderstood by some as intended to call that authority in question, or at least to set it aside for the future, yet His obedience up to the present time, renewed as it was after this momentary interruption, and prolonged through nearly twenty years, sets a solemn seal of consecration upon it, and illumines it with a flood of glory which can hardly be exaggerated. The words of Mary are the voice of Nature, and the answer of Jesus may have been designed to raise her mind and heart to the Supernatural; but there was no fault in the one, and therefore there could be no blame in the other. Mary spoke the language of the purest maternal love and solicitude to a child who, though Divine, had always been subject to her, and Himself had given her rights over Him. He had given her the right to expostulate with Him, by His uniform docility and dutiful obedience up to the present moment; and she humbly asks the cause of this strange interruption of His usual course of conduct. I say, she asks humbly, for her

humility and prudence are sufficiently attested by the way in which she speaks of her husband, St. Joseph. She names him first, and calls him the father of Jesus, as of course he was in affection and care and anxiety, and as head of the household, providing for all their material wants. But those who heard him so called, would of course understand much more than this, and she was not unwilling that they should, because the time was not yet come for the revelation of the mystery. She speaks then in the name of both, because as both had shared the joy of His presence and the privilege of His obedience, so both had now sorrowed together at His loss, and wondered at the cause of it.

"Jesus said to them: How is it that you sought Me? did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" These words acquire a special value from the consideration, that they are the very first words of our Divine Master which have been preserved to us, and we must not be surprised if they are mysterious, and require thought and care for their interpretation. No doubt the first impression which they convey to the minds of all who read them, is unfavourable to our Blessed Lady. Every one

feels that they bear upon the face of them something of the tone of a rebuke addressed to her; yet when we come to examine them more closely in connection with the circumstances under which they were spoken, all are equally forced to acknowledge that there seems to be no place for a rebuke. Was it blame-worthy in Mary and Joseph, that they should have sought for Jesus, when they had lost Him? Would it not rather have been a just subject for the severest censure if they had omitted to do so? And how could they have known of His purpose to make a public beginning of His devotion to His heavenly Father's business at this particular period of His life? We nowhere read that He had told them so, nor had such an intimation been conveyed in the prophetic revelations of the angels, or of St. Elizabeth, or of holy Simeon, or of any other. What was there then that could have imparted to them this knowledge? or is there any reason whatever for supposing that they had ever received it? The most diligent study of the written word has failed to discover the slightest token of such information having been imparted; and yet Jesus speaks as though Mary and Joseph ought to have known. Such at least

has been the ordinary interpretation of His words. It has been suggested, however, by one of the latest writers * on the subject, that His meaning may have been no more than this: "How is it that ye sought Me among your kinsfolk and acquaintances? Did you think that I would leave you for *them?* There was but One for whom I would leave you; it was in *His* House that you should at once have looked for Me." This interpretation has the merit of great simplicity, and I do not see how any Protestant can reasonably object to it, seeing that it only adds to our Lord's words a reference to something that has been distinctly recorded in the sacred narrative. It is however, so far as I know, quite new, and it is not easy to understand why the words should have offered any difficulty to our Blessed Lady herself, as they certainly did, if they were capable of so natural an explanation. It seems more probable that we should understand our Lord to have spoken darkly, and as in a figure, and that the true sense of His words was hidden, and belonged to some future time, rather than to that in which they were spoken; or it may have been that He spoke thus sharply, and in a tone

* *Dublin Review*, No. 14, p. 501.

of apparent reproof, for the same reason as merely human teachers sometimes do, when they desire to awaken special attention to the thing taught, which might otherwise be lost, either through inadvertence, or through unwillingness on the part of the hearers to receive it.

Mary had enjoyed the blessedness of her Son's continual presence from the moment of His Birth, but this was not to continue to the end, and He would prepare her soul betimes for the necessary change. By-and-by there was to be another three days' loss, whilst the Body of Jesus lay in the tomb, of which loss this was a shadow and a foretaste; and again before that, there would be yet another and a longer loss (or at least an absence and a separation so continual as almost to amount to a loss), for three years, during the whole period of His public ministry; and it was well that Mary's thoughts should already be trained to rise above her present appreciation of the merely corporal presence of her Son, and steadily to contemplate the change in their relations which was hereafter to follow. When He was about to withdraw His visible presence from this world, and to return to His Father in heaven, He forewarned the Apostles

of His coming departure, and consoled and instructed them about it. "A little while and you shall not see Me, and again a little while and you shall see me, because I go to the Father."* Was this "little while" during which Mary saw not Jesus, because he was engaged about His Father's business, intended to be her lesson of instruction in the same subject? We do not know, but at least it seems probable; it was not given even to Mary herself to know at that time, for we read that "they understood not the word that He spoke unto them."

Some interpreters indeed would fain exclude our Blessed Lady from the compass of this observation, by supposing that the Evangelist spoke either of the doctors and other by-standers, or of St. Joseph only. But either of these suppositions seems to do violence to the sacred text, neither are they supported by any ancient tradition. For the same reasons we should reject another interpretation also, according to which Mary is supposed really to have understood what had been said, but out of humility to have spoken and acted as though she did not understand, that so she might share with

* St. John xvi. 16.

her spouse the reproach of ignorance. It will scarcely be worth while, however, to enumerate and examine all the various reasons which have been assigned for our Blessed Lady's not understanding her Son's words; especially since those who delight to make the most of the ignorance and darkness of her mind only succeed in bringing out all the more strongly the supernatural virtues of her heart. Granted (for the sake of argument) that she understood nothing, and that this want of knowledge was a defect and a humiliation, yet it is certain that she did not on that account waver in her faith: "She kept all these things in her heart." She was neither curious in inquiring into things hidden from her, nor rebellious against mysteries she could not comprehend, but she remained always docile, faithful, and obedient; and this trial of her understanding only increases our estimate of her humility. It must be added, however, that her ignorance could not possibly have been so absolute as some of her detractors would wish to represent it. For it is impossible to doubt but that both Mary, and Joseph too, knew well of whom Jesus had spoken, and who was the Father about whose business He had been en-

gaged: only, neither of them understood what the particulars of the Divine business were, nor why it had begun so unexpectedly, nor how long it was to last. The circumstances of time and place and manner had not been revealed to Mary, or were now supernaturally obscured from her sight by the darkness which God suffered to overcloud her understanding. Spiritual darkness and desolation have ever been one of the trials of God's Saints, and the greater their sanctity, the sharper ordinarily is their trial. We might have expected, then, that Mary as the Queen of Saints would be specially tried, and this was an hour of sharpest trial to her; it was as a deep shadow from Mount Calvary suddenly cast upon the heavenly brightness of Nazareth. The sword had come to her before the Cross had come to her Son, and it had come from an unexpected quarter, and had pierced with its keenest edge. Jesus Himself will one day cry out to His Heavenly Father in the moment of His greatest agony, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"; but Mary had already been forsaken by her Divine Son, and when she had sought Him sorrowing, and now her whole soul was flooded with joy at having found Him,

He Himself seems only to drive the sword yet deeper into her heart, for He seems almost to question her right to seek for Him. He asks, "How is it that you sought Me?" as though He had never at all belonged to her, or as though her whole heart and soul had not been always wrapt up in Him.

But though trials and crosses be the lot of God's Saints, He does not leave them without consolation, and the consolation is proportioned to the loss. Mary has been tried and humbled, she is now to be comforted and exalted. He Who by His words had seemed but now to have disowned her, or at least to have claimed for Himself an exemption from her control by virtue of an obligation laid upon Him by an authority higher than hers, now in act obeys her, and obeys her for nearly twenty years. He goes down with her to His former home in Nazareth and "is subject" to her. What are we to think of this? Did He, at Mary's word, suspend His occupation about His Father's business? Or was His Father's business to be carried on for all those years in the humble cottage of Nazareth, and did it consist in Mary's sanctification? And in either case, what a marvellous exaltation of Mary! In

the Old Testament it is recorded with wonder that "the sun stood still in the midst of heaven for one day, the Lord obeying the voice of a man;" * but what was this interference with the course of the material creation for a few hours, compared to the suspension of the great work of man's Redemption for eighteen years? We turn then to the other alternative, and believe that Jesus was still "working," † though in private, and that His main work was in the soul of Mary. And who shall say what mutual converse passed between the soul of the Son and the soul of the Mother during those years of retirement and solitude? Who shall count the profusion of lights and graces she received? or measure the height of sanctity to which a soul, so faithful in its correspondence to grace and so admirable in its purity and diligence, must needs have arrived after so long and intimate a converse with the very source and fountain of grace Himself? If Mary, the sister of Lazarus, earned the praises of Christ and received a promise of final perseverance because she sat at His feet, hearing His word, whilst her sister was busy about many things in the service of the same Master,‡ how

* Josue x. 14. † St. John v. 17. ‡ St. Luke x. 39.

much more highly honoured and abundantly rewarded shall not she be, whose blessed privilege it was during so many years to unite the active and contemplative service of God in their very highest perfection; tending, nursing, and feeding Jesus as an infant, and ministering to all His temporal wants as He grew up, whilst at the same time she "sat at His feet," watching His every word and work, "keeping and pondering them all in her heart."

"Going down with them to Nazareth, He was subject to them." Few and simple words; but the summary of ten-elevenths of the life of God upon earth, of thirty out of thirty-three years of the life of Jesus! Stupendous thought! Wonderful fact! Has it no meaning? Had it no consequences? Is it possible that men who profess a most religious reverence for every word that fell from the lips of Jesus, can be altogether indifferent to a word, an act of His which lasted nearly all His life through? that men who find in those questions—"How is it that you sought me?" Did you not know?"—convincing arguments in disparagement of her to whom they were addressed, can turn a deaf ear to the panegyric of thirty years' silent obedience to the

same "Blessed Woman"? Compare with this mode of handling God's word the comment which St. Bernard* makes upon the history we have been considering. "'He is subject to them,'—Who is subject? and to whom? God to man. God, to Whom the angels themselves are subject, Whom principalities and powers obey, God is subject to Mary, and not to Mary only, but to Joseph also for Mary's sake. Admire which you will, and say which is the more admirable of the two, the gracious condescension of the Son, or the excelling dignity of the Mother. Both are stupendous, miraculous. God obeying a woman —humility without example. A woman commanding God—exaltation without parallel. In the Canticle of the Virgins it is celebrated as one of their privileges, that they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth: what then shall we say, what praises can suffice, for her whom the Lamb Himself followeth?"

Which of these commentaries on the sacred text commends itself most to your minds, that which is ordinarily in vogue among Protestants or that of the Catholic saint and doctor? Surely no reverent mind can hesitate in his choice be-

* Hom. 1. de Laud. Virg.

tween them, and no impartial judgment can fail to recognize in this incident in the life of Jesus, a most powerful argument in favour of Catholic doctrine as to the exalted dignity of Mary, and the power she once exercised over her Son. There may be more or less of difficulty in the interpretation of particular words or phrases, but the main fact in all its principal circumstances tells most strongly in the direction I have intimated, and the truthfulness of the following summary of it will be generally admitted. The conduct of Jesus towards His Blessed Mother during the first twelve years of His life had been so uniformly docile and obedient, that when once He performed an act without her knowledge and consent, she forthwith called Him publicly to account for it, using (as any ordinary mother might have done) words which in their plain and natural sense implied some degree of reproof. Jesus gave her a brief explanation of His conduct, which she did not fully understand at the time; and then immediately returned to His former habit of obedience, which was not again interrupted for a period of eighteen years or more.

Thus one result of this act of our Blessed Lord

is to elicit a very marked expression of Mary's authority over Him, and to impress very deeply on our minds the fact of His habitual subjection to her. If any man seek for a reason which justified (so to speak) the single act of disobedience, Catholic doctrine is at no loss to supply it. "By His thirty years' subjection to 'His parents,' He inculcated most forcibly the ordinary rule of obedience to parents; by remaining behind at Jerusalem, He illustrated the one necessary exception—the obligation of neglecting filial ties where God summons to His service."* As St. Ambrose † says, "Being about to prescribe to others that he who doth not leave father and mother is not worthy of the Son of God, He Himself is the first to subject Himself to this very sentence; not with the intent of discountenancing those offices of piety which are due to a mother (for it is His own commandment that he who honoureth not his father or mother should die the death), but because he knows [and desires to teach others] that more is due to the mysteries of His Heavenly Father than to natural affection for his earthly mother." Had Jesus acquainted

* *Dublin Review*, No. 14, p. 501.

† In Luc. lib. vi. § 36.

Mary and Joseph with His intention before acting, they would at once have humbly acquiesced, and the particular lesson which we have supposed Him to have had in view — a lesson so hard for flesh and blood to learn—viz. that God sometimes calls persons to embrace the religious life even without their parents' consent—would have been altogether lost. Finally, no Catholic ought to have any difficulty in understanding why our Lord should not have shrunk from inflicting this heavy sorrow of the three days' loss upon His holy mother. It was needful for her to suffer like any other, or rather above any other, member of His mystical body, in proportion to her nearness to Him and the degree of her future glory. "To be deprived of God and not to know why, was a vast furnace of affliction to a soul so ravished with love." It was then a great means of Mary's perfection, and in its measure it has been repeated again and again in the secret histories of other saintly souls. Moreover, on a future occasion I hope to show you that this is not improbably the truest account which can be given of the sharp words that were spoken, as well as of the absence itself which occasioned them.

LECTURE IX.

MARRIAGE FEAST OF CANA IN GALILEE.

"On the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee: and the Mother of Jesus was there.

"And Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the marriage.

"And the wine failing, the Mother of Jesus saith to Him: They have no wine.

"And Jesus saith to her: Woman, what is to me and to thee? my hour is not yet come.

"His mother saith to the waiters: Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye.

"Now there were set there six water-pots of stone, according to the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three measures apiece.

"Jesus saith to them: Fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.

"And Jesus saith to them: Draw out now, and carry to the chief steward of the feast. And they carried it.

"And when the chief steward had tasted the water made wine, and knew not whence it was, but the waiters knew who had drawn the water, the chief steward calleth the bridegroom,

"And saith to him: Every man at first setteth forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. But thou hast kept the good wine until now.

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee; and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him." *St. John* ii. 1—11.

WE may certainly say of this Gospel what St. Peter has said of some other portions of Holy Scripture, viz., that it contains "some things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest to their own perdition." It has been read to-day,* not only in all Catholic churches throughout the world, but also in all Protestant places of worship belonging to the established religion of this country: and of those who have heard it in these places, thousands upon thousands, as they listened, have (almost involuntarily perhaps) had hard thoughts about *us*. They have fancied that they recognized in the conduct of our Lord on this occasion a practical contradiction and distinct condemnation of all that we delight to say and do towards the Blessed Virgin. They imagine—I hardly like to say the words; yet so it is, they imagine—that our Blessed Lord by His own example at

* First Sunday after Epiphany.

this wedding-feast in Cana of Galilee, deliberately intended to teach us to be disrespectful to His Holy Mother. Unable to comprehend her pure and spotless sanctity, and unmindful of what St. Paul has said, "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life," they dare to say that when the Blessed Virgin called her Son's attention to the deficiency of wine at the feast, she was actuated by a motive of vanity, wishing Him to make a display of His Divine Power, only that honour and glory might thereby be reflected upon herself as His Mother, and that our Lord, to rebuke and punish her for this fault, publicly disowned her, saying, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?"

And yet to you, my Brethren, whose blessed privilege it has been to be brought up within the fold of Christ's Holy Catholic Church, this incident in our Lady's life has always seemed one of the most solid, edifying, and instructive foundations of your devotion to her. So far from its being a source of difficulty to you, which you would fain hide from the eyes of Protestants and even from your own (as some of them sincerely believe that it is), you have always delighted to meditate upon it, as recognizing here a most

signal instance both of the goodness and power of your dear Mother Mary. Let us call to mind the principal circumstances of the narrative, and comment on them as we proceed.

"There was a marriage in Cana," a little village or town between four and five miles from the Virgin's home at Nazareth, "and the Mother of Jesus was there." Mary, at this time (as we may believe) a widow—for we hear no more of St. Joseph after the return to Nazareth from the finding of our Lord in the temple at Jerusalem—Mary is invited to this wedding; probably by reason of some near relationship to the bride, and to act as her companion or matron. And then it is added, "And Jesus also was invited and His disciples to the marriage." Even Calvin and other Protestant commentators have remarked upon these words as seeming to indicate that Jesus was introduced here by His Mother; that as His disciples were invited for His sake, so He Himself had been invited for His Mother's sake, and because of her presence there. Anyhow it is clear that as yet there is nothing in the narrative inconsistent with that state of filial dependence upon His Mother, in which the Evangelist represents Him after the mystery of His ques-

tioning and answering the Doctors in the Temple, when He went down to Nazareth and was subject to her. He had not yet begun His public life and ministry; He is about to begin it to-day; He has been baptized by St. John the Baptist, who has also pointed Him out as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world: two of St. John's disciples have left their former teacher to follow Him; one of these has persuaded his brother to join him: Jesus Himself has called a fourth; and these all, it would seem, had already begun to lead a common life with their Master, so that where He went, they went also. Now therefore they are invited with Jesus to the marriage.

The feast proceeds, we must suppose, more or less after the ordinary manner of such entertainments, until by-and-by there is found to be a deficiency of wine. Mary sees this deficiency; as a woman, a mother, and (as we have suggested) nearly related to the hosts or givers of the feast, she feels for their embarrassment, and charitably interests herself for their relief. What more natural, more purely and simply natural, more tender and touching from its very simplicity, than this incident in the life of Mary? How

should she fail to be touched with pity and compassion? What could we expect but mercy and tenderness of the most exquisite kind from her who is the very Mother of Mercy? "As the hand" (says St. Bernard) "which has long held some fragrant fruit or flower, retains the sweet odour thereof all the day long, so surely must *she* have been penetrated through and through with kindness and mercy, in whose womb Love and Mercy itself had reposed for nine whole months; and the more so, since that Love dwelt in her heart before it lay in her womb, and when it left her womb to be born into this world, it did not forsake her soul." It was only natural then, and what we should have expected, that Mary should have had compassion on the embarrassment of the newly-married couple, and should have desired to interest the love and power of her Son on their behalf.

"The wine failing, the Mother of Jesus saith to Him, They have no wine." Few and simple words; yet what a world of thoughts do they not suggest! How many and what heroic virtues do they not imply! They express, on the one hand, the tender consideration of Mary for her friends; on the other hand, her own modesty and pru-

dence, yet at the same time her most perfect faith and confidence both in the power and in the goodness of her Divine Son. She does not command, she does not even ask. She confines herself to the most simple statement of their wants, well knowing that it is of the very nature of goodness to be communicative, always ready to give to others, so that there is no need of earnest solicitations; it is only necessary to point out the occasion or opportunity. And since here the goodness of Jesus could only manifest itself by a miracle, and that too a miracle which (so far as we know) was as yet without example, our dear Lady made in these words a most wonderful act of faith in the Divine Power of her Son. She spoke to Him as to the Creator of all things, to whom nothing was difficult or impossible. And, once more, these words show also her entire submission to the will of her Son, and the intimate union and (if I may so express myself) most perfect understanding which existed between them. There was no need of long discourses. Her humility made her love to keep silence, and there was no necessity for her to be importunate; she broke silence but by four short words, enough to tell Jesus what was wanted, not enough to do

violence to her modesty and bring her forth from her beloved retirement.

"Then Jesus saith to her, Woman, what is to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come." Observe, not "What is *it* to Me and to thee?" as it has unfortunately been of late years misprinted in some of our Bibles, but only "What is to Me and to Thee?" Protestants have translated the words, "What have I to do with thee?" and they explain them as though they were intended to resent and rebuke Mary's interference. For the present, however, let us postpone all critical discussion as to the precise meaning of the terms employed: let us acknowledge, for the sake of argument, that their tone seems at first somewhat harsh and cold, and as if the speaker purposed to refuse the request that had been made and at the same time to deny any special connection between Himself and the petitioner; moreover, that He appears to assert that this is not a fit and proper occasion for the manifestation of His Almighty power, or at least that its exercise at this moment would be premature. Yet even so, there remains to be considered the sequel and conclusion of the whole incident. Granted that the words will bear this

signification, the question must still be asked, Was this the sense in which Jesus really spoke them? Did Mary so understand them? Did He Himself by His acts confirm this interpretation of His words?

On the contrary, Mary, conscious that what she has asked, or hinted at asking, will not be denied her, turns to the servants and says, "Whatsoever He shall say to ye, do you;" and then Jesus proceeds at once to work the miracle. This, then, is the practical issue of the matter. The beginning and ending, the whole sum of the incident may be thus briefly expressed: Mary asks, and Mary obtains, a miracle to be wrought by her Divine Son. This is undeniable. Protestants may insist, if they will, that between the asking and the receiving there is an apparently severe reply from Jesus. But who does not see that His action is the only true interpretation of His words? A petition is made; the most perfect answer to this petition is the granting of it; this Jesus does; the words He interposed may be a mystery, they cannot surely be a contradiction of His acts. It were hard to believe that He chides by His word one whom He so highly honours by His deed. Nay, more, who does not see that the

word enhances the importance, adds greatly to the significance of the deed? Imagine for a moment that the words had never been spoken; cancel them, and let us suppose that Mary had asked for, and Jesus had performed, the miracle without a moment's hesitation or delay. It would then have seemed only as one of our Lord's ordinary miracles; as if He had done it, not in any way because Mary wished it, but because of His own good nature He was ever disposed to do acts of kindness to all who stood in need of them, and that Mary had only proposed the occasion, but had been in no way the cause of the miracle being wrought. Whereas, those words of Christ, that apparent hesitation and unwillingness (as Protestants understand it) on His part to do it, followed immediately by His doing it, point it out to us in a most singular manner as Mary's work, that He has done it for Mary's sake, and would not have done it but for her. You see, then, how the very answer of Jesus at which Protestants take offence, may be relied upon by Catholics as a very signal instance of that influence and power which they attribute to our Blessed Lady, and a sanction of that honour and reverence which they pay her.

But how, then, do we explain the apparent severity of the answer? Wherefore did our Lord seem to have an intention of refusing, when all the while He really purposed to grant her petition? Several solid and instructive reasons might be assigned for this mysterious action. First, it may have been for this very reason which has just been hinted at: viz., that by magnifying the favour demanded, and showing it to be out of proportion with the occasion, and yet presently granting it, He might encourage us never to despair of obtaining anything, whatever we may ask of His bounty, if only Mary intercede for us. Here, the miracle asked for had nothing in itself to recommend it and make it a matter of special interest to our Lord for its own sake. In this respect it is unlike most of the other miracles which He wrought. Here was no widow mourning over the loss of an only son, no child of Adam possessed by the devil, or suffering from some painful or loathsome disease and seeking deliverance from his affliction; it is merely a matter of trifling inconvenience, of temporary embarrassment, so that it did not seem an occasion of sufficient solemnity for the first display of His Divine Power; and yet it was done out

of consideration to the intercession of Mary. We may justly argue, then, that perhaps our Lord's words may have been spoken for this very purpose, as they certainly have this effect; viz. to show us the power of her influence, and to encourage us to have recourse to it. What may we not expect that He will do for her when the hour of glorifying her throughout all the earth is come, since for her sake He even anticipates the hour He had resolved upon for the manifestation of His own glory?

But secondly, our Lord may have intended both to try and to manifest the sublime constancy of Mary's faith. It is thus that He deals with those souls that are dearest to Him; "Whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth, and He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." For great souls, souls that are most firmly rooted in faith and love, He provides a larger measure of the Cross: to them apparent rebuffs, outward trials, and contradictions are but the proofs and stratagems of His love. An eminent example of this may be seen in His mode of dealing with the Canaanitish woman of whom we read.* You remember the obstinacy, if I may so speak, with which our Lord

* St. Matt. xv. 21—28.

seemed to reject and refuse her petition; yet how He granted it in the end, and with what words of commendation He dismissed her. The poor woman came crying after Him, begging for mercy for her daughter, grievously troubled by a devil. At first He takes no notice. He acts as though He did not even hear her: "He answered her not a word." Then His disciples come, and beg Him to send her away, because her cries after Him are troublesome. He gives them in reply a reason for not granting her request; saying that she is a stranger, and that He is sent only to the children of Israel. By no means disheartened, she still perseveres, and makes her petition yet more earnestly. "She came and adored Him, saying, 'Lord, help me.'" He answers as it were sternly, and gives yet another reason why He should not grant her prayer: "It is not good to take the bread of the children and to cast it to the dogs." Nevertheless, she answers yet once more; and Jesus rewards her faith by performing the miracle. Now of course He intended—to use human language about the actions of the Son of Man—He intended to do this from the beginning. Her faith was not hid from Him, and He purposed to reward it. But, wishing to

increase her merit, He subjected her faith to those hard trials, and made as though He would not hear her. The result has been, that we have a higher estimate of her merits than we could otherwise have had, and she herself has a higher place in heaven. Even so Mary, too, knew the merciful delays, the favourable refusals, the mysterious flights of the sacred Spouse; all the secrets whereby His ingenious love tries faithful souls; that He often rejects, only that we may learn to gain by humility and persevering confidence what the first petition fails to obtain. And hence His seeming refusal did but increase her merit, whilst at the same time it raises our sense of her heroism, of the unwavering constancy of her faith. As we meditate on the narrative, we begin to understand something of what is meant by that saying, more than once repeated in the Gospels to the praise of the Blessed Virgin; viz., that she kept and pondered in her heart all those things which were said or done concerning her Divine Son.

Hitherto I have commented on this passage in our Lady's life with reference to the ordinary Protestant impression about it, and I think it will have been made clear even to those who are dis-

posed to adopt their interpretation of the text, that there is nothing in it which can be rightly considered to derogate from our Lady's honour. The truth is, however, that the words of our Blessed Lord have not necessarily any severity in them at all. They contain a grave and important truth, but they may have been spoken in the most respectful and affectionate manner; as the same words certainly were spoken on other occasions, by the poor widow of Sarephta (for instance) when she obtained from the prophet Elias the resurrection of her son,* and by others, both in the Old Testament and in the New.† What the words really express is the absence, or denial, or deprecation, of any special connection at this particular moment when the words are spoken, between the person using them and the person to whom they are addressed, and they may be used indifferently by a superior speaking to an inferior, by an inferior to a superior, or by equals, one with another. In the instance before us, Mary has asked for a miracle, as the result shows; and it was of course to the Divine Nature that her appeal had been made, and it was this same

* 3 Kings xvii. 18.

† See Cardinal Wiseman's Essays, vol. i. p. 96.

Nature therefore which replies. Between this nature and the nature of Mary the distance was infinite; for, although Mary is rightly called the Mother of God because of the indissoluble union of the Divine and Human natures in the one Person of Jesus Christ her Son, yet she is not the Mother of Christ's Divinity. And it was important that this truth should be publicly stated and insisted upon at the commencement of His ministry. As St. Augustine says, commenting upon this very passage,* "Christ Jesus our Lord was both God and Man; as God, He had no mother; as Man, He had. Mary then was His Mother in the flesh, in His manhood, in that weakness which for our sakes He took upon Him. But the miracle which He was about to perform, He would perform by virtue of His Divinity, not of His human weakness; because He was God, not because He had been born a weak man. 'But the weakness of God is stronger than men.' The Mother then asked for a miracle; but He, as it were, refuses to recognize the womb whence He had been born, when He is going to perform Divine works, saying in effect: 'That part of Me which works miracles you did not

* In Joann. Evang. Tract. viii. 9.

produce; you are not the Mother of My Divinity. But because you are the Mother of My infirmity, I will recognize you then when that infirmity shall hang upon the Cross.' For this is the meaning of the words, 'My hour is not yet come.' For then, in the hour of His infirmity, He acknowledged her whom in truth He had ever known. Before He was born of her, He knew her in predestination; and before, as God, He had Himself created her of whom as man He was to be created, He had known His Mother. But for a certain period and in a mystery, He does not acknowledge her, and by-and-by, at a certain period which has not yet arrived, He will again in a mystery acknowledge her. He will acknowledge her then, when that which she had brought forth was at the point of death."

The Saint alludes of course to those words which Jesus spoke from the Cross, when He commended His Mother to the beloved disciple, saying to St. John: "Behold thy Mother;"* and the "hour," therefore, during which He would not recognize His Blessed Mother, during which there would be "nothing to Him and to

* Cf. St. Aug. in Joann. Tract. cxix. § 1.

her," would be (according to this interpretation) the whole period of His public ministry, from this first miracle in Cana to His death on Calvary. By-and-by, when this was ended, another hour would come, when there would "be to Him and to her"; the hour of His triumph when she might legitimately exert her influence over Him; when she might ask and obtain from Him miracles; in a word, when she would take her predestined place in His kingdom.*

We shall have to recur to this subject in a future Lecture; at present I will conclude with another passage taken from the same Commentary of St. Austin, wherein he answers the heretics of those days who took exception, as Protestants do now, against the apparent harshness of Christ's words to Mary. "What is the meaning of this?" he asks, "Did Jesus come to this marriage to teach a lesson that mothers were to be despised? I presume that the man to whose marriage He came, was marrying a wife that he might have children, and we may presume too that he wished to be honoured by those children whom he desired to beget. Had Jesus then come to this marriage to put disgrace

* Newman's Letter to Dr. Pusey, p. 146.

upon His mother, when marriages themselves are celebrated and wives are taken in order that children may be born, which children God distinctly commands to honour their parents. Without doubt, my Brethren, there is some mystery here (*latet ibi aliquid*)." Would to God, my Brethren, we could impress these last words of salutary caution upon the hearts of all Protestant students of Holy Scripture at the present day. If the Catholic interpretation of these texts of Holy Writ, which seem to them to tell against devotion to our Blessed Lady, does not quite satisfy them, let them at least learn to be less impatient of difficulties; let them not rush at once into anything so truly monstrous and revolting as the ordinary Protestant interpretation of the history before us; let them be content to say with St. Austin, "*latet ibi aliquid*,"—"there is some hidden meaning here which we cannot fathom." I have called the ordinary Protestant interpretation monstrous and revolting, for so in truth it is; it comes briefly to this, that Mary "makes a request which is unbecoming and irreconcilable with the due order of God's Providence; yet that our Lord grants the

request, whilst rebuking her for making it!"* It is impossible to conceive a more extravagant ascription of power to our Blessed Lady than is involved in this statement, to say nothing of its inconsistency with the highest attributes of God. How much more modest and reverent is the language of St. Austin, when first he approaches the difficulty. "If you ask," he says, "why Jesus answered His mother in this way, let him who understands tell us; but let him who does not understand, nevertheless believe most firmly both that He did so answer, and yet that she really was His mother [and, we may add, that He treated her with all the reverence that was her due]. By behaving in this way, he will deserve also to understand the reason of His so answering, provided he knock at the door of Truth by prayer, and not in a spirit of contention."

* *Dublin Review*, ubi supra.

LECTURE X.

THE MOTHER AND BRETHREN OF JESUS.

"Jesus' mother and brethren came unto Him, and they could not come at Him for the crowd. And it was told Him, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to see Thee. Who answering said to them; My mother and my brethren are they who hear the Word of God and do it."—*St. Luke* viii. 19—21.

THIS is one of those sayings of our Divine Saviour, of which I spoke to you in my first Lecture, and of which such frequent use is made in modern days, as an occasion, if not for abuse, yet certainly for disparagement of our Blessed Lady, and reproach of Catholics for unduly exalting her. In earlier ages of the Church, when the mystery of the Incarnation, in its very essence, was the one object of heretical attack,

sayings of this kind were used for a somewhat different purpose. Men "having no *thorough* knowledge of Holy Scripture," as Epiphanius justly says, "but choosing to follow after the truth merely according to their own private judgment," fancied that they could gather from this and a few similar texts, a distinct denial, on the part of Christ Himself, of the reality of His Human Nature and Nativity.

Thus, the heresiarch Manes in his controversy with St. Archelaus in the third century argues after this fashion. "God forbid," he says, "that I should believe that Christ Jesus my Lord was born of a woman, as other children are born, since He Himself testifies concerning Himself, that He came down from the bosom of the Father." He then quotes two or three more texts to the same effect, and continues, that if his opponent knows the truth better than Christ Himself, and will insist upon our believing that He was really born of the Virgin Mary, there is an end of Christianity altogether. "There was once indeed," Manes proceeds, "a man in the Gospel who believed the same thing as you do, Archelaus, and who therefore dared to say to Jesus on a certain occasion, 'Thy mother and

Thy brethren stand without,' but Jesus would not have it, and rebuked Him, saying 'Who is my Mother, or who are my brethren?' and He pointed out that those who did His will were His mother and brethren. If then you choose to say that Mary was His Mother, it is at your own peril, and see what comes of it. It follows as a certain consequence that He had brothers also by her. Tell me then, Were these brothers begotten by Joseph, or by the same Holy Spirit Who begat Christ? If you say the latter, then we have more Christs than one. If you say that they were not begotten by the Holy Spirit, and yet maintain that He had brothers, then we must conclude that after the Holy Spirit and after Gabriel, the most chaste and spotless Virgin became the wife of Joseph. But if it is monstrous and absurd to suppose that she ever lived as the wife of Joseph, whence had He any brothers? Will you dare to accuse her of adultery? or, if every supposition of this kind is wholly out of place when speaking of the spotless Virgin, how else will you account for them? If then you are driven to acknowledge that He had no brothers, how can you prove that Mary was His Mother, since the same authority speaks of one and of the

other, saying 'Behold Thy Mother and Thy brethren'? I know indeed that this man dared to speak of both, but no one can be a higher authority upon this subject than He who Himself showed us who was His real Mother and brethren, and who would not suffer Himself even to be called the son of David."*

It will have been painful to some amongst you, perhaps, to listen to the language of this heretic, so "ruthlessly logical" in his mode of handling the words of one particular text; at the same time, it is very instructive, as well in what he dares to say, as in what he assumes that nobody would dare to say; and it may prove a useful warning to some as to the abyss of error into which the Protestant principle of Biblical interpretation may lead. I will venture, therefore, to continue my quotation from his argument upon this question a little longer.

He proceeds thus:—"St. Peter the Apostle, the most eminent of all the disciples, was able to recognize who Jesus really was, and when each one was setting forth the opinion he had formed about Him, this apostle said, 'Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God,' whereupon

* St. Matt. xxii. 45.

straightway Jesus blessed him, saying that His heavenly Father had revealed it to Him. Mark the contrast, then, between these two answers which Jesus made. To the man who said, 'Thy Mother and Thy brethren stand without,' he answered, 'Who is my Mother and my brethren?' But to him who said, 'Thou art Christ,' He forthwith gave a blessing and a reward. If then you choose to maintain that He was born of Mary, you make both Him and Peter to lie; but if Peter spoke the truth, then without doubt the other man spoke falsely."

We are told that when the speaker had ended this sophistical harangue, there was a commotion among the people, for his words seemed to have a great show of reason, and they thought that the Catholic Bishop would have nothing to say in reply. But when the noise had subsided, St. Archelaus began to answer his opponent, point by point. I must content myself with giving you a brief summary of his argument, which came in substance to this, that both St. Peter and the man who made the announcement about His Mother, received from Jesus a fitting answer to the question each had put or the statement he had made. "As long as any one is a child," he

says, "he thinks as a child, he understands as a child; but when he has become a perfect man, those things which belong to a child will be put away; that is to say, whilst a man is stretching forth towards those things which are before, he will forget those which are behind him. Hence it was that, at a moment when Jesus was teaching and healing mankind, and all his hearers were intent on these matters, the message of that person who spoke about His mother and brethren was most inopportune. For tell me this. Supposing that Mary *was* His mother, would you have had Him leave those whom He was healing and teaching, to go and converse with her? Had he not Himself denounced and condemned such conduct? Would not you have straightway made it the subject of a charge against Him, had He so acted? For, when He chose twelve sinful men and made them His Apostles, He bade them forsake father and mother that they might be made worthy of Himself, that so the memory of their parents might never at any future time bend their firmness from the straight path of duty. And again, when some one offered to follow Him but asked first to go and bury his father, Jesus said to him, Let the dead bury their

dead. Observe then how carefully my Lord Jesus Christ builds up the disciples in all things necessary for them, and how He utters sacred words to each one who approaches Him according to their respective merits. Thus on the present occasion, when a man speaks to Him inopportunely about His Mother, He does not choose to neglect that which had been laid upon Him by His Father on account of His Mother's presence. And that you may see more clearly the truth of what I say, remember what happened to Peter some time after he had received that blessing of which you speak. When Jesus had told him that it was necessary for the Son of Man to go up to Jerusalem and to be slain, and to rise again on the third day, Peter said, 'Lord, be it far from Thee, this shall not be unto Thee.' Then Jesus answered and said, 'Go behind me, Satan, because thou savourest not the things that are of God, but thou savourest the things that are of men.' Now, you have maintained that the man who spoke to Jesus about His Mother and brethren was rebuked by Him, but that Peter almost secured everlasting bliss by his confession, 'Thou art the Son of the living God.' Yet see now, how, on the contrary, Jesus prefers the one

before the other, giving the one a mild and gentle answer, but to Peter, spite of the blessing he had lately received, addressing no kind word of forgiveness, because he had not taken heed to the nature of what he was saying. The mistake of His mother's messenger was corrected by a reasonable reply; but Peter's slowness of heart to understand was condemned by a very sharp rebuke. Whence you ought to perceive how the Lord Jesus takes notice of the opportuneness of each question that is put to Him, and shapes His answer accordingly. It remains then, that if we would understand His sayings, we must always take into account the circumstances under which they were spoken; the place, the time, the persons, the subject-matter, and its bearing upon the salvation of those who come to Him."*

This is an interesting and valuable specimen of ancient Catholic and—what I will venture to call — Protestant commentary upon our text. The Catholic commentary has always remained substantially the same, so that it would be easy to bring together a multitude of passages from

* See note in Lecture III. p. 56. I have not attempted a strictly literal translation of the original text, but only an abridgment. No new idea has been introduced.

the Fathers and Doctors of the Church in all ages, containing the same general interpretation of our Saviour's words as that suggested by St. Archelaus; and in fact, anything that we shall say upon the text ourselves will only develop in greater detail his ideas and argument. But the Protestant commentary has varied very materially in the course of ages. We have seen how the early heretics sought by means of it to destroy men's belief in the human nativity of Christ. I do not suppose that in modern times it has been ever so used. But in the sixteenth century the more violent and extravagant of the Protestant Reformers built upon it a charge against our Blessed Lady of "rudeness, pride, arrogance, ambition, and blasphemy," and concluded that for these grievous sins she was rebuked and put to open shame by her Son;* and the same error in a milder form will probably be found in most Protestant commentaries of the present day. I observe that one which enjoys considerable popularity† runs in this wise: "Jesus' mother and brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him, when they should have been standing

* See Brentius apud Canis. de B. M. V. lib. iv. c. 19.

† Henry and Scott.

within, desiring to hear Him. Frequently those who are nearest to the means of knowledge and grace are most negligent." If this remark is intended to apply to our Blessed Lady as well as to the "brethren," the writer would seem to have forgotten the express and repeated testimony of St. Luke as to her diligence in hearing and treasuring all the words that fell from her Son or concerned him. Presently the writer goes further, and says: "They not only would not hear Jesus themselves, but they interrupted others that heard Him gladly." We need not quote more, but we will proceed at once to follow the excellent rule laid down by St. Archelaus, and examine as closely as we can all the circumstances of the incident, that so we may gain a truer insight into the meaning of Jesus' words.

Two of the Evangelists indeed, St. Matthew* and St. Luke, only record that Jesus' mother and brethren stood without and were anxious to speak to Him, but could not come at Him for the crowd who were sitting round Him, and that under these circumstances one of the bystanders made known their desire to Jesus. St. Mark,† however, adds that they themselves sent Him a

* xii. 46. † iii. 31.

message, announcing their presence and inviting Him to come and speak to them. It is of course upon this invitation of our Blessed Lady that Protestants seek to ground their charge against her of rudeness, pride, and ambition; but Holy Scripture having observed an absolute silence upon the motives of her conduct, it is as open to Catholic interpreters to suggest motives of love and piety, as it has been to Protestants to invent others that are dishonourable. We know from the fourth Evangelist* that at a later period of our Lord's ministry, His "brethren" did not believe in Him, though they pressed Him to make a more public manifestation of Himself, and to perform His miracles in Jerusalem rather than in the obscure towns of Galilee; and it would be quite natural and in harmony with all that we read and believe about our Blessed Lady, to suppose that she had brought these "brethren" on this particular occasion that they might hear our Lord's discourses, and hearing might believe. Or again, we might conjecture that they came out of solicitude for our Lord's temporal well-being. Seing how eagerly He was followed by the multitude, and how unintermittingly He gave

* St. John vii. 5.

Himself to their service, "having not so much as time to eat,"* they might have wished to avail themselves of their natural relationship as a pretext for obtaining for Him some rest and refreshment from His labours. In a word, it is possible to conceive a variety of circumstances which may have caused Mary quite naturally and innocently to desire to speak with Jesus, nor is it necessary, in the silence of Scripture, that we should insist on one conjecture as to these circumstances in preference to another. What Scripture has recorded, and what it concerns us to consider, is the answer which Jesus gave to the message He received.

And here too, before we consider the words themselves, it is obvious to remark that we cannot argue from any harshness of character which they may seem to have when read in a book, that they were really spoken with harshness or were understood, at the time they were spoken, to convey any rebuke. We have seen how when He was reclaimed by His mother after the three days' loss in the Temple at Jerusalem, He spoke words which seemed to censure her interference, and yet He obeyed the summons

* St. Mark vi. 31. See also St. John iv. 6, 31—34.

and was subject to her for twenty years. Again, on the occasion of the miracle at Cana in Galilee, an apparent refusal in words was immediately followed by a compliance with the request in fact, and there is nothing to show but that the very same thing may have happened here also. We are quite at liberty to imagine, if we like, that our Lord, after uttering the words which the Evangelists have recorded, rose up and proceeded to grant His mother the interview she had asked for; there would be nothing at all strange in such a supposition; on the contrary, it is more probable than not; but it is not certain. All that we are told is that He answered the interruption in these words, "Who is my Mother and my brethren? And then, looking round about on them who sat about Him, He saith, Behold my Mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of God, he is my brother, and my sister, and Mother."

I need not say that these words were no answer really sent to His Mother and brethren, but rather a lesson of instruction addressed to those "who sat about Him;" nor can it be necessary to point out to any one who is familiar with the Gospels, how common a thing it was

with our Blessed Lord to direct His answers not so much to the questions that had been put, as to the inward thoughts and motives of those who put them; how sometimes He set aside the question altogether as though He had not heard it, yet proceeded to make it the occasion of imparting some general lesson which it suggested. This is precisely what He does now. Whilst engaged in teaching, His attention has been called to His Mother and brethren according to the flesh; and perhaps some of those who stood by may have been watching, to see whether or no He would interrupt the discharge of His office as a prophet and messenger from God to listen to the claims of flesh and blood and mere natural relationship. For it had been noted as the special excellence of the tribe of Levi, God's ministers under the old law, that "he had said to his father and to his mother, I do not know you, and to his brethren, I know you not, and their own children they have not known."* It was the characteristic also of Melchisedech, the priest of the most high God and a singular type of that new order of priesthood to which Christ Himself belonged and which He purposed to establish upon the earth, that he

* Deut. xxxii. 9. See also Exod. xxxii. 27—29.

was "without father, without mother, without genealogy;"* and it was not fitting that he should even seem to be in aught inferior to His type. Moreover, He was to set an example to all who should come after Him, and in an especial manner to those who were to be made in any way partakers in His own sacred office, to carry on the work He had begun; those of whom He had said, "As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." And there was no lesson more important for them to learn, and none perhaps more difficult to practise, than that God's honour and service must ever be preferred before considerations of flesh and blood; that the disciples of Christ, and especially His priests, must be ready to forsake "house and brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, for His sake,"† everything (in a word) that might stand in the way of their undivided service of God, because "no man being a soldier of God, entangleth himself with secular businesses, that he may please Him to whom he hath engaged himself."‡

These reflections serve not only to explain the words of our Blessed Lord on this particular occasion, but also throw great light on the ob-

* Heb. vii. 3. † St. Matt. xix. 29. ‡ 2 Tim. ii. 4.

scurity in which our dear Lady is enveloped during the whole period of His public ministry. As St. Augustine * says, "Being a Divine teacher, He sets aside His Mother's name which had been announced to Him, and which was in a manner personal, private, and peculiar to Himself, as though it were something earthly when compared with heavenly relationship." And in the same way during His whole ministry He as it were neglects her and shows no consciousness of her existence, that He might act as He would have His own disciples to act, that so, when their turn came, they too might not be afraid or ashamed to act in like manner, for "he that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." † We do not even know whether she followed Him, as other pious women did, during His travels from one place to another, whilst He preached the word of God and healed the infirmities of men. Her name is not mentioned by St. Luke; ‡ he only tells us of "certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary who is called Magdalen, out of whom seven devils were gone forth, and Joanna

* Epist. 38, ad Lætum.
† St. Matt. x. 37. ‡ viii. 2, 3.

the wife of Chusa, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who ministered unto Him of their substance." In this silence of Holy Scripture, it is not wonderful that merely human writers have been divided in opinion. We shall not repeat the arguments of either side, or try to balance the degree of probability which belongs to each, but merely content ourselves with stating what is certain, viz., that after having been present at one of the very earliest acts of her Son's public ministry in Cana of Galilee, she went down with Him and His brethren and His disciples to Capharnaum, but that they did not remain there many days;* that she sought to speak with Him on the occasion mentioned in the text, and that she was present at the closing scene of all on Mount Calvary.

* St. John ii. 12.

LECTURE XI.

THE PURITY OF MARY A HIGHER PRIVILEGE THAN HER MATERNITY.

"It came to pass, as Jesus spoke these things, a certain woman from the crowd lifting up her voice said to Him, Blessed is the womb that bore Thee and the paps that gave Thee suck. But He said, Yea rather, Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it."—*St. Luke* xi. 27, 28.

THESE words of our Blessed Lord are so like to those on which we spoke in our last Lecture, that we might almost have taken them together and made them the subject of a single discourse. They were spoken, however, on a different occasion, and are worth considering by themselves. Of course they bear on the face of them something of the same general character, as far as our Blessed Lady is concerned, as those others, of which we have already treated, so that

I do not doubt that some of you who were brought up in heresy, still retain a kind of uneasy suspicion in their regard, as though there really were some Protestant sense in them, and some note of censure set by them upon those who would magnify the glories of Mary. Yet the Church, on the other hand, has selected them to be read as the Gospel of the Mass on some of her principal festivals, and all priests recite them every day after the end of their office. Since nobody therefore will accuse the Church of taking part with the enemies or detractors of Mary, it is clear that there must be some way of understanding the words in a totally different sense from that which they convey to the Protestant hearer. Let us examine what this difference is.

Protestants then contend that our Lord here denies what the woman had said, and puts something else, more or less contrary to it, in its stead. Let us grant for a moment that this account of the words is literally true (though we shall presently see that it is not); yet even so, it would by no means follow that our Blessed Lady received no blessing, and deserved no congratulation for having given birth to Jesus, and having brought Him up through infancy and childhood to man's

estate, which is the conclusion they desire to draw. Compare other sayings of our Lord, whose form more or less nearly approaches to this reading of the text, and see how far they will bear this same hard and literal handling. Jesus bade the Pharisees on one occasion, "go and learn what this meant," which God had spoken by the mouth of the prophet Osee, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." * What *did* it mean? Did it really abrogate the Divine Law which had enjoined so many sacrifices, and did it sanction the substitution of voluntary works of mercy in their stead? And did Jesus intend that they should gather this lesson from it? He says also in the same place, "I am not come to call the just, but sinners." Had He then not come for the just? Had He no call, no message for them? Was there really a class of men upon earth who had no need of His saving help? And again, at another time, Jesus bade His Apostles take no thought how or what they should speak, when they were brought before kings and governors for His sake, for (He said) "it is not you that speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." † Did He mean to deny that

* St. Matt. ix. 12. † St. Matt. x. 20.

the Apostles had any part in what was spoken on these occasions? Or is there not rather in all these passages a comparison instituted between two classes of things or persons, and a preference given to one over the other, which preference, however, is strongly expressed by a Hebrew idiom that seems to accept the one and absolutely to reject the other?

It is hardly necessary to multiply examples of the same mode of speaking, which abound in Holy Scripture; I will only bring one other, which is sufficiently remarkable to deserve a separate mention. I allude to the words which our Lord once addressed to "great multitudes" who were following Him, when He "turned round and said to them, If any man come to Me, and *hate* not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." * Did any individual among those great multitudes ever understand this precept of the God of love to condemn all natural affection and to enjoin the opposite feeling of hatred? The conclusion then is obvious, that even if our Lord's words to the

* St. Luke xiv. 26.

woman who proclaimed the praises of His Mother had been far stronger than they are, even had they distinctly denied that Mary was entitled to any praise at all, and rebuked the woman for offering it to her, still they would have been of no controversial value for the purpose for which Protestants would fain use them, unless it could be shown that they had been spoken simply and positively, and not merely by way of comparison with something else. However, when we come to consider the words more thoughtfully and without prejudice, it is clear that our Lord does not deny what the woman had said at all, nor put something else in its stead; on the contrary, He repeats, acknowledges, and confirms the truth of what she had said, and only goes on to add something else to it, to say something further and of more practical importance above and beyond her announcement. She had said, "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the paps that gave Thee suck." And Christ answers, Yea, yes, it is so; they are blessed indeed; but still more "blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." And this second and greater blessedness belongs —Protestants themselves being judges—to Mary, *as well as,* in addition to and as a preparation for,

that other blessedness of which the woman first spoke. In other words, the woman had said that Christ's Mother was blessed for her maternity's sake, because she enjoyed the singular privilege of being the Mother of God. And Christ added, Yes, but she is still more blessed for her purity's sake, her sanctity. He does not indeed speak of His Mother only, but of all who hear His word and keep it. But this does not exclude His Mother, and what Protestant will dare to say that His Mother did not hear His word and keep it too? more especially since Holy Scripture distinctly testifies that she did.*

It will help us yet further to see the true meaning of this passage, and to detect the falsehood of the ordinary Protestant interpretation of it, if we compare with it another passage of the Gospels, of which a similar mis-use has been made by other Protestants. It is recorded by the same Evangelist, St. Luke, a few chapters later in his Gospel: † "A certain ruler asked Jesus, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to possess everlasting life? And Jesus said to him, Why dost thou call Me good? None is good but God alone." There have been certain heretics before

* St. Luke ii. 19, 51. † xviii. 18.

now, there are some even at the present day, Arians, Socinians, Unitarians, and the like, who argue, from this passage, that Jesus was not God; for that He disclaims the title of Good, and says that none is good but God alone. And it is very possible for one reading the words carelessly to fall into this mistake; very possible for one who has always been taught, and is firmly persuaded that Jesus is not God, and wishes to persevere in this belief, to deceive himself by a plausible argument of this kind, just as all Protestants, or nearly all, deceive themselves into thinking that in those other words which we are now considering, our Lord disclaims and rejects the praises given to His Blessed Mother. I say nearly all, because some learned commentators, such as Grotius for example, frankly acknowledge that our Lord's answer is by no means a contradiction, but a correction and completion of the woman's remark.

The truth is, that in neither case did our Lord deny, disclaim, or reject what had been said. In both cases He only sought to supply what was wanting to the speaker, and to turn what had been said to a practical purpose. This ruler had called Him Good, and he had done well; but he

means nothing more by this title than an acknowledgement of His Goodness in the same sense as he might have called any other amiable, benevolent, and upright person, good. But Jesus sought to draw him on to something further; to make this the occasion and foundation of instructing him in the doctrine of His Essential Divinity. Just so, in the passage before us, this woman had called the Mother of Jesus blessed, and she had done well; but Jesus sought to draw her on to something further, to make it the occasion of instructing her and all future generations in the infinite dignity and blessedness of religious faith and obedience. Neither the woman nor the ruler erred in what they said, but they had not said enough; their meaning and intention fell short of the truth; and partial truth is often quite as injurious as mere unmixed error; indeed sometimes it is far more so.

The praise of our Blessed Lady's privilege as the Mother of God in the mouth of this poor woman was all very well; but it was calculated to turn men's minds away from any practical imitation of our Lady's virtues, since, *as* a privilege, it was wholly personal and incommunicable to any other; but the case was far otherwise with

her sanctity; this could be imitated, and this is what our Blessed Lord desired. And therefore in His answer He really declares that those who imitate her in her faithful observance of God's Word, shall be made partakers with her of a higher blessedness; so that if it were possible for a man to equal or surpass the sanctity of Mary, he would also receive an equal or a greater blessing than that which is the reward of her Maternity. In Mary both these blessings were united; so that Jesus is not comparing Mary with some other person, but only comparing the different gifts and offices which were united in her one person; and He teaches that Mary's greatness and blessedness as a Saint, as one hearing the word of God and keeping it, is superior to that which she enjoys by virtue of the incommunicable privilege of her office as His Mother. She was glorious indeed, most glorious and blessed, raised far above all creatures, by her office as the Mother of God; but she is yet more glorious and blessed for her personal purity and holiness; her perfect sanctity is a higher gift than her relationship to God.

This is what our Lord really teaches us in those words, so strangely misinterpreted by Pro-

testants; and this is what Catholic Bishops and Doctors of the Church have always said from the beginning. "More blessed was Mary," says St. Augustine, "in receiving Christ's faith than in conceiving Christ's flesh;" and St. Chrysostom declares that she would not have been blessed at all, though she had borne Him in the body, had she not also heard the word of God and kept it. Of course this is an impossible supposition, for she was made holy that she might be made His Mother, and the two blessednesses cannot in her be divided. She who was chosen to supply flesh and blood to the Eternal Word, was first filled with grace in her soul that she might be made worthy, or at least less unworthy, of so stupendous a privilege. It remains then that she had a double blessedness,—of office, and of qualification for it; and the latter was the greater of the two. It was also the one which it most concerned our Lord as teacher of mankind to insist upon, because it was more or less within the reach of all, whereas the privilege of her Maternity was altogether beyond us, at least in its literal sense; for we must not forget that Christ in His infinite love has vouchsafed to call us also to a real, though spiritual participation even in this most

intimate relationship to Himself, since He says, "They who hear the word of God and do it, they are My Mother and My brethren." We all know that faith and obedience give us a title to be considered the brethren of Christ, for we are taught that to "as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God," and "if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God and joint-heirs with Christ." * We are then His brethren; but how can we become also His Mother? By bringing Him forth in the hearts of others, as St. Paul says of himself, writing to his Galatian converts, "My little children, of whom I am in labour again until Christ be formed in you;" † and St. Gregory the Great and our own St. Anselm comment upon this passage, saying, "He may be said to bring forth Christ, who introduces Him to the heart of a disciple; He becomes Christ's Mother, whose voice causes the love of God to be produced in the soul of his neighbour. A man becomes His brother or sister by believing, He becomes His Mother by preaching."

You see then, my Brethren, how truly I said that the Church recognizes no contradiction, not

* St. John i. 12; Rom. viii. 17. † iv. 19.

even a shadow of opposition, between these passages of Holy Writ and her own teaching as to the dignity and blessedness of Mary; and yet no one can pretend that she overlooks these passages, or fails to give them a clear, definite, and important meaning. And indeed if men would only be more careful than they ordinarily are to distinguish between the sacred text and the gloss which peculiar associations have put upon it, it would have been impossible that they should have so misconstrued plain and simple words like those of our text. This woman who lifted up her voice from among the multitude, and cried out to Jesus, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee," only gave utterance to a thought which must needs have been present to the hearts and minds of thousands. For she spoke the language of nature and of truth. "A wise son," says King Solomon in the Book of Proverbs,* "maketh the father glad, but a foolish son is the sorrow of his mother." There is a most intimate union between the honour or the dishonour of children and their parents; and this woman's exclamation therefore, I repeat, was most simple and natural. Not less natural,

* Prov. x. 1.

if I may say so, was the answer of Jesus. For He had come among men as their Master and Teacher, to show them the way to heaven, and He never lost an opportunity of pointing it out to them. He would not have this woman, then, divert her attention from the one only thing which it concerned her to know; He would not allow her admiration of His words and works to be wasted in idle commendation of another's good fortune; but He would show her how she might obtain an equal or a greater blessing for herself. This is a complete summary of the incident; and nothing but the inveterate prejudices of a mind starting with a settled disbelief in our Lady's privileges, and eagerly looking out for everything that might be made to militate against them, can account for the attempt to fasten another interpretation upon it. On the other hand, a mind that is full of Catholic devotion to our Lady, and conscious of the deep significance of every word which fell from the lips of Jesus, when it meditates on the words spoken on this particular occasion, finds in them fresh testimony, if not to the power, yet certainly to the sanctity of Mary. Conscious of that double blessedness of which I spoke just now—of office,

and of fitness for it—it seems to recognize in the relative value which our Lord assigns to each, a confirmation of what had been before proclaimed by St. Elizabeth, who, filled with the Holy Ghost, first saluted Mary as blessed by virtue of her office, saying: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb;" and then goes on to allege the other, deeper and earlier foundation of her blessedness, her own faith: "Blessed art thou that hast believed."

And this is only in exact conformity with what Catholic theology teaches us—*i.e.* with what reason and Scripture and the Doctors of the Church teach us—concerning the laws of God's dealings with the children of men; viz., that when a person is chosen by God for any office, he is always prepared and fitted by Him, and endowed with all the gifts and graces that are necessary for the proper discharge of the duties of that office; as we see in the case of Moses, for example, and Josue, chosen to be leaders of the children of Israel under the Old Law; or, again, in the Apostles, the leaders of the new children of Israel, the Christian Church. God, having called them to that high office, also fitted and fashioned them for it. He gave them the gift of speaking

with divers tongues, and of working miracles. He filled them with the Holy Spirit, that they might know what answers to make when they were brought before the tribunals of their heathen persecutors. He inspired them with a burning zeal for the salvation of souls, to encourage them in their labours, and with a constancy to endure all torments, even death itself, in the discharge of the trust committed to them. And so it was, in a yet higher degree, with reference to our dear Lady. She was chosen for an office higher than that of prophets or apostles, above and beyond all other offices ever bestowed on one of Adam's race, an office that could only be held by one, and, on that very account, requiring—may I not say compelling? — special and singular gifts to be bestowed by God on the person selected to fill it.

Without inquiring, then, into the details of Mary's sanctity, we are assured beforehand that it must needs be something extraordinary, almost surpassing our powers of appreciation, even as the dignity of her office surpasses them. If all that approaches near to God in any way is consecrated and sanctified; if the very temples and churches, instruments and vessels of His service, are

ordained to be set apart by solemn consecration, and henceforth have a sacredness peculiarly their own; if those who at any time have been chosen to become especial representatives of the Most High, have ever received special gifts to fit them for their office, what must have been the sanctity of Mary, what the gifts and graces bestowed upon her to prepare her to become the Mother of God? It was for this that, as we believe, by a special and singular grace of God, she was exempted from the universal law of original sin; it was for this that her virginal purity was preserved by miracle, and a Virgin bore a Son; and it was for this same cause that we believe her to have been "full of grace" and "blessed among women;" Queen of Angels and of Saints, the ideal of human perfection, the most perfect model of every Christian virtue; with the faith of the patriarchs, the wisdom of prophets, the zeal of Apostles, the constancy of martyrs, the chastity of virgins; with charity the most ardent, humility the most profound, patience the most tried and the most triumphant, resignation the most courageous, conformity to the will of God the most absolute; higher in holiness, as in dig-

nity, than any other of God's creatures, whether men or angels; higher than Angel or Archangel, Cherubim or Seraphim, thrones, principalities, and powers—in a word, Queen of Heaven and earth.

LECTURE XII.

MARY AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS.

"There stood by the cross of Jesus, His Mother, and His Mother's sister Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore had seen His Mother and the disciple standing whom He loved, He saith to His Mother: Woman, behold thy Son. After that, He saith to the disciple, Behold thy Mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own."—*St. John* xix. 26, 27.

WE come now to the closing scene of our Redeemer's mortal life, when His Blessed Mother again appears and stands out a prominent figure on one of the latest pages of Gospel history. We had almost seemed to lose sight of her since the return from Egypt, and the retirement into the hidden life at Nazareth; certainly since the beginning of the public ministry at the marriage feast in Cana; and, therefore, her re-

appearance here at the close of it is so much the more remarkable, especially as she does not remain upon the scene and accompany our Lord during the forty days of His sojourn upon earth after His Resurrection; but, on the contrary, does not even find a place in the record either of that mystery, or of the Ascension. The pious imagination of the faithful may picture to itself what it pleases as to Mary's part in those glorious mysteries; but the Gospel only sets her before us in the sorrowful mystery of the Crucifixion, just where we should, perhaps, least have looked for her. Nevertheless, there she stands at the foot of the Cross; and as we cannot think of the Child laid in the hard bed of the crib at Bethlehem without His Mother watching over Him, so neither will the Gospel let us picture to ourselves the Man of Sorrows stretched on His last and more cruel bed of the Cross, on Calvary, without His Mother also.

And observe, it is only at the Crucifixion itself that she appears, not in any earlier stages of the Passion. She is not of the number of those women who followed Jesus along the way of sorrows, "bewailing and lamenting Him;" and St. Leo points out to us the reason of her absence.

Those women, good and pious as they were, were only moved (he says) by human sympathy, at seeing a just man suffering unjustly; they wept as for a weak and helpless man, led forth to a cruel and ignominious death. But Mary must not be confounded with these. She knew the dignity of the sufferer, the causes and the fruits of the suffering; and she stood there as representing — almost as being in herself at that moment—"the Church of the living God, the pillar of the truth;" not attracted by any merely natural sympathy, or giving way to merely natural feelings. On the contrary, there is an entire absence of every sign of natural weakness and of woe; no fainting or sobbing, no outcry, no wild gesture of uncontrollable grief; she stands motionless as a statue, not surely a statue of indifference, nor yet of stupor and amazement, but simply a statue of tranquillity: a witness of all that happens, a fellow-victim in some sort with the sufferer, herself ready to do and to suffer God's holy will in all things, even at this most trying moment of her life. "She *stood* by the Cross of her Son." Amid that troubled scene of pain and sorrow, blood and tears; amid the blasphemies of the executioners, the insults of

the people, the consternation of the disciples, the cries and lamentations of the pious women, the last words and the loud cry of the Divine Victim Himself, the commotion and darkness of entire nature, Mary, the Virgin Mother Mary, with a strength beyond her sex, beyond that of ordinary humanity, stood calm and silent. "I read that she stood," says St. Ambrose, "I do not read that she wept." And surely we cannot wonder that the Church should have always recognized in this most touching and amazing incident, a deep mystery, and a fruitful source of consolation and of grace.

You may say, indeed, that the Evangelist gives no indications of this mystery in his mode of relating the circumstance; that he simply records what really happened as a matter of history, without manifesting any sentiment about it at all. And this is true. But the same remark might be made on every part of the Gospel narrative. Everything in it is simple, but everything is also profound; and these two characters are united yet distinct, even as the two natures in Him of whom the Gospel speaks, Jesus Christ our Lord, Who was at the same time perfect man and perfect God, yet but one Person. Even so,

the Gospels are to be received as narratives in all the simplicity of their historical meaning, and to be studied as mysteries in all the depth of their doctrinal signification; and yet they are but one and the same Scripture. This reflection must needs force itself, more or less, on every thoughtful student of the inspired narrative. None but the most careless and indifferent reader could rest content with what lies upon the surface in this passage of the Gospels. For, at first sight, the brief simplicity of St. John's words is so absolute that you would think he had failed to recognize any hidden food, either of doctrine or devotion, in what he said; as though it were possible that the disciple whom Jesus loved, who had leaned on Jesus' breast, and heard and felt the beatings of the Sacred Heart as He instituted the Sacrament of His love, should have been present when His Master was dying a death of agony and of shame, and should have received from His dying lips the solemn trust of caring for His widowed and desolate Mother, and yet have felt no emotion at the tender confidence implied in so touching a gift. He expresses none in His words, but this is because he writes, not as a man, but as one inspired by the Holy Ghost;

the Divine inspiration supersedes and conceals all human feeling; he records the facts which it concerned the Church to know; the full import of those facts the Church would hereafter learn through the same Holy Ghost, who would be sent to teach her all truth.

But again it is objected, that the whole incident was simply natural, the dutiful act of a dying Son, affectionately careful to provide a home and a protector for a Mother who was presently to be left in singular desolation. But surely it is scarcely possible that any man can acquiesce in this interpretation who holds a right faith about the doctrine of the Incarnation; who really believes that Jesus Christ was God, and that He was at this moment accomplishing one great end of His mission upon earth, paying the price of the world's redemption. The Evangelist who alone has recorded the incident of which we are speaking, goes on immediately to add, that Jesus "knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst;" after which, having said, "It is consummated," He "bowed His head and gave up the ghost." You see the Divine Wisdom, which "reacheth from end to end mightily and

ordereth all things sweetly," was most careful in appointing every circumstance of this august ceremonial, if I may so speak — this "High Mass of the World's Redemption," as it has been called, "offered by Jesus to the Eternal Father, while the countless angels are the audience and the spectators." At such a moment there was no room for anything merely temporary, personal or private; all was public, universal, and of perpetual application, "for us men and for our salvation." We know indeed that in that same hour Jesus prayed for His murderers and promised Paradise to the penitent thief; but though that prayer and that promise were made for certain definite individuals and couched in private and particular terms, yet had they also another and a larger sense, in which they are not even yet exhausted. He prayed not for those only who were then and there putting Him to death, but also for all sinners to the end of the world, who, as St. Paul tells us, are continually repeating as it were that crime, "crucifying to themselves again the Son of God;" and that most gracious promise to the thief is a pledge and assurance of the forgiveness of all true penitents even to the end of time. Just so, those

few words spoken to His Blessed Mother and to St. John were of no merely temporary and present signification, but established the relation of Mother and Son between the Blessed Virgin and the faithful in all ages. The Blessed Virgin stood at the foot of the Cross, not merely or principally because of the natural love which she bore to the fruit of her womb who hung thereon; for nature would rather have taught her, for His sake at least, if not for her own, to be absent from so terrible a spectacle, since, so far from being able to relieve His sufferings, she could only add to them the further pain of witnessing her own. But she was there for this very end, that she might receive this legacy from her dying Son, —us to be her children. And John too stood at the foot of the Cross and received this last token of his Saviour's love, not on his own account merely, and as something personal to himself as one of the sons of Zebedee, but rather as he was a type of all good Christians, the representative of the whole body of faithful disciples. And our Lord spoke, not as the Son of Mary or the Master of John, but as the Redeemer of mankind; and therefore it was that He addressed the Blessed Virgin not by the endearing term of

Mother, expressing that natural relationship towards her which was then so deeply involved and so cruelly tried, but by the more cold and distant name of Woman. "Woman, behold thy Son;" "not as though He ignored or refused the duties of filial piety," says St. Ambrose, "but to show that everything in Him, even the most innocent and holy affections, was altogether subject to the one end for which He came into the world, to do the will of His Heavenly Father and to redeem lost humanity."

Again, this word, Woman, thus solemnly uttered at the close of our Lord's ministry, naturally carries us back to that other occasion when it was first spoken at its commencement: we are transported in memory and imagination from Calvary to Cana. *Then* Jesus said, His hour was not yet come; and, during the course of His ministry, the Evangelists remind us of this mysterious hour, St. John telling us on more than one occasion,* that "the Jews sought to apprehend Jesus, but no man laid hands on Him, because his hour was not yet come." But by-and-by, "before the festival-day of the last pasch," we read that Jesus "knew that His

* vii. 30; viii. 20.

hour was come, that He should pass out of this world to the Father;" * He begins also to speak of His death, and He says distinctly, "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified." He prays also, "Father, save me from this hour, but for this cause I came unto this hour. Father, the hour is come, glorify Thy Son." † And after the agony in the garden, He tells His disciples, "Behold, the hour is at hand." ‡ In this hour then, now that it *is* come, He once more addresses the "Woman" whom so long ago He had seemed to disown and to separate Himself from, because the hour was not yet come. Jesus now recognizes Mary, speaks to her and assigns to her her place in the new and spiritual kingdom which He was establishing. She was to be the Mother of its members: she was already the Mother of its Head, Himself, and could not of course ever cease to be so; but henceforth she was to be our Mother also, because we were now His brethren. "To as many as received Him He gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name." § St. John was the type of all these; and he became both the son of God

* xiii. 1.
† xii. 23—27.
‡ St. Matt. xxvi. 45.
§ St. John i. 12.

and the son of Mary. As Jesus, by the mystery of the Incarnation, was given to God and to Mary as the Son of Man, so by the mystery of the Crucifixion we also are made at one and the same moment children of God and of Mary.

By the one mystery the Son of God was made man; in the other, the children of men are made the sons of God; and in both Mary has her place. In the one, she is declared by the salutation of an angel to be the Mother of God; in the other, by the express appointment of God, she is made to be the Mother of men.

And yet once more; this title of Woman thus publicly proclaimed at the beginning of the new creation seems to take us back to the beginning of the old creation, when God said to the serpent, "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel." For that prophecy was being now fulfilled: the serpent was at this very time pouring forth the utmost venom of his malice upon the heel of the woman's seed, the only part in which he was vulnerable, His human nature which He had received from Mary; and at the same time, that seed of the Woman, or the Woman by her seed,

was crushing the serpent's head. He was "blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us; and He was taking the same out of the way, fastening it to the Cross, and despoiling the principalities and powers."* And in the same hour, Mary also was fulfilling in a signal manner, in her own person, a part at least of the sentence originally pronounced against the woman: "I will multiply thy sorrows and thy conceptions; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children." For this scene on Mount Calvary was at once to make her childless and to give her multitudes of children; and certainly no one will dispute the fitness of that language of the prophet which the Church uses to express the dolours of Mary at that moment: "O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow." "To what shall I compare thee, or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem?"† And as Jesus by the sacrifice He was then offering of Himself was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaias, ‡ "If he shall lay down his life for sin, he shall see a long-lived seed," so Mary, by uniting in

* Coloss. ii. 14, 15.

† Lament. i. 12; ii. 13. ‡ liii. 10.

the same sacrifice, became a partaker in the same blessing, and she who had brought forth her "first-born" without pain in Bethlehem, now became the Mother of "a long-lived seed" amid all the pangs of a most cruel martyrdom on Calvary.

If St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians,* could justly claim the title of a parent in their regard, because he had preached the Gospel to them, and converted them from Heathenism, saying, "In Christ Jesus by the Gospel I have begotten you;" how much more justly may not *she* claim to be our Mother, from whom we have received not the mere oral preaching of the Gospel, but the Author of the Gospel Himself. If the manifold labours of the Apostolate give a right to the name and authority of a Father, and may even be justly compared to the pains of maternity: "My little children, of whom I am in labour again, until Christ be formed in you," †—certainly the Dolours or Compassion (as it is sometimes called) of our Lady on Mount Calvary, give more than a sufficient right to the name and affections of Mother. She had borne us, as it

* 1 Cor. iv. 15. † Gal. iv. 19.

were, in the womb of her affections from the moment of the Annunciation, when she knew that the Holy which should be born of her was to save His people from their sins, and knew also the cost at which He must do it. When she made an offering of Him in the Temple, and the aged Simeon told her of the sword that should pierce her soul, she received Him back from the hands of the priest, not to bring Him up as her own Son and for herself, but even as Jochabed received back her infant child Moses from the hands of Pharao's daughter, as a child whom she was to nurse for awhile, but when he should be grown up, must deliver again that he might "go forth to his brethren and redeem them from their affliction." And now that the time is fully come, she stands on Mount Calvary, not as a mere spectator, nor yet drawn by a merely natural motive, but as a partaker and a co-operator in a great supernatural mystery. She stands there, to consummate that offering of herself and of her Son which had first been made four-and-thirty years before, in those words which she addressed to the Angel, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word;" an offering which had been renewed again and again

ever since, but was now to be ratified for the last time and for ever.

But O! who shall say what that ratification cost her! Two opposing interests divided her maternal heart; two contrary affections contended within her, like the two children struggling in the womb of Rebecca,—the Son of God and the sons of men; and it was impossible that either should be satisfied but by the sacrifice of the other. The sons of men were not to be saved but by the death of the Son of God; if the bitter chalice of suffering and of death was to pass away and He drink it not, they would still remain in bondage: which should prevail? O well might she at such a moment repeat the lamentation of Rebecca: "If it were to be so with me, what need was there to conceive?" To what end did I conceive the Son of God, if He was to be thus cruelly sacrificed in my sight? Wherefore was I saluted as "blessed amongst women," if I was also to be made the most desolate among mothers? Such at least would certainly have been the voice of nature; but not such was the voice of Mary. She knew that "the elder must serve the younger;" that He was come among us to be "as one who serveth;" she had

brought Him forth, not that He might live, but that He might die, to the end that we should live; she was not the Mother of a Man-God who afterwards became a victim for the sins of the world, but she was the Mother of One conceived and born only to be a victim; she had been made the Mother of God that she might also become the Mother of men.

There hung her first-born, the Son of God, expiring on the Cross; but from His own dying lips she receives the other, "the disciple whom He loved;" "Woman, behold thy son." And in him she receives all those other disciples whom Jesus loved; those whom He so loved that He laid down His life for their sakes. She understands and accepts the exchange; she undertakes, and ever after fulfils, the office assigned to her. For when God bestows a title, or calls by a special name, His works accompany His words, or rather His words are themselves works; they are not like the words of men, a mere breath of the mouth dividing the air, striking the ears of those who hear, and then passing away and becoming as though they had never been; they are works, as I have said; they do what they say. As at the first, "He

spoke and they were made, He commanded and they were created," so has it continued ever since. God called Abram Abraham, or the father of many nations, and He made him such; He changed the name of Simon to Peter, or Rock, and He made him the rock whereon He built His Church; and so here also, when He called Mary our Mother, He made her such. He filled her heart with a Mother's love and care for us; He endowed her with a Mother's power and a Mother's privileges in our regard. And since His words once spoken do not pass away but abide for ever, she still remains, and will remain to the day of judgment, and even *in* the day of judgment itself, our most tender and loving Mother. Yes, Mary is the Mother of Jesus, and she is also our Mother; Mother of Him in heaven, of us on earth. What, then, may we not hope for? for what can she not do with Him? what will she not do for us? He Who gave the command, "Honour thy father and mother," cannot be indifferent to a Mother's prayers. She who received this last dying injunction from her Son to "behold her children," will not neglect her children's wants. "Repeat, then, O my soul," let us boldly cry out with St. Anselm,

St. Bonaventure, and so many others of the Saints,—"repeat, O my soul, with joy and confidence, 'I will rejoice and be glad; the Mother of God is my Mother; the Mother of the Judge is the Mother also of the criminal; the final judgment in our regard hangs upon a Mother's prayers and a Brother's word.'"

LECTURE XIII.

MARY AFTER THE RESURRECTION.

"Jesus rising early the first day of the week, appeared first to Mary Magdalene."—*St. Mark* xvi. 9.

NOTHING apparently can be more precise and positive than this statement of the Evangelist, that our Lord vouchsafed the first manifestation of Himself after His Resurrection to "her who had been a sinner;" and we should search the other Gospels in vain for a single word by which to raise a question upon this point. Nevertheless, there is a feeling most deeply impressed on every Catholic heart, that the first appearance of our risen Lord must needs have been vouchsafed to His Blessed Mother, and that such appearances must have been re-

peated again and again so long as He remained upon earth. This feeling is founded both upon the goodness and justice of God: His justice, because she was specially privileged to share in the Passion of her Divine Son, and therefore must have shared also, in some eminent degree, in the joys and glories of His Resurrection; His goodness, because His kind and tender heart must have yearned to console His Mother who had drunk so deeply of the chalice of bitterness at the foot of the Cross; and the only obvious means whereby this could be effected, is presumed to be the prerogative of the earliest and most frequent enjoyment of Christ's visible presence upon earth.

Accordingly, both devotional writers and commentators on Holy Scripture have not hesitated to say that Christ did *not* appear first to Mary Magdalene, but to Mary the Virgin; and they explain the silence of the Evangelists as to this appearance to His Mother, by saying that the Holy Spirit only cared to put on record those witnesses whose evidence could be appealed to as inspiring faith into unwilling and unbelieving minds; that Mary's near relationship to Jesus might have thrown discredit on her testimony;

that, as she neither doubted herself for a single moment about the fact of her Son's Resurrection, nor was one of those preordained to preach it to the world, all mention of her in this part of the inspired narrative was unnecessary. But that He really did vouchsafe His first appearance to Mary they consider certain. They quote the Easter-hymn of the Church, in which we call upon her to "rejoice because He whom she has borne has risen as He said," and they ask how it is possible to conceive that a loving and dutiful Son should have withheld, for a single hour after it was within His power to grant it, so great a joy and consolation from so faithful a Mother. A sword of sharpest sorrow had pierced her soul in the Passion; and now that the fruit of that Passion was to be gathered, a torrent of joy suddenly inundates her soul with gladness, and that deep wound is healed and filled with overflowing sweetness, at the sight of her risen and triumphant Son. But she kept it in her own heart, as she had done all things else from the beginning, and there was no need that she should reveal it. If the words of the other holy women, who had been only the faithful companions of Jesus, "seemed to the Apostles to be idle tales,

and they did not believe them,"* how much less credit might they have given to the Mother's tale? Finally, if the silence of the Evangelists is to be insisted upon as excluding whatever they have not recorded, it would follow that Jesus never showed Himself at all to His Mother after His Resurrection, which is quite inconceivable.

This is not the time or place for considering the weight of these arguments. I am only concerned to acknowledge and account for the fact that our Lady's name nowhere appears in the sacred records between that terrible scene of blood and darkness on Mount Calvary and that other scene in an upper room in Jerusalem, when "there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty wind, and there appeared parted tongues as it were of fire;" between Good Friday and Whit-Sunday. For, if we consider the circumstances of the case, and the accuracy with which the most minute details of Christ's several appearances during the forty days between the Resurrection and Ascension have been recorded, we shall find it impossible to believe that this omission or silence has been without design; and since I am precluded by the very conditions of

* St. Luke xxiv. 11.

these Lectures from adding any facts to our Lady's life beyond those which are written in the Gospel, I am at least bound to show you that this silence is in no way derogatory to the dignity which Catholic theology attributes to her. I think, however, we may venture to say much more than this; I shall boldly assert that it is in the highest degree honourable and glorious to her sanctity; and the proof of this assertion is simple. Not a single person is recorded to have had any share in the appearances of our risen Saviour, upon whom the sacred narrative has not set some mark of blame with reference to them; either for error or for ignorance, for weakness of faith or for positive incredulity; and it would seem that the sight of Jesus which was vouchsafed to them, was intended as a distinct remedy for the evils under which they laboured.

Let us go through the several narratives of these appearances in their order, and we shall see the truth and the importance of this remark still more clearly. Thus, the first witnesses of the Resurrection were the holy women, who, with our Blessed Lady, were near the Cross at the crucifixion. They are mentioned by name on both occasions; only on the latter occasion our

Lady no longer appears among them. They come to the sepulchre, not believing or hoping for the Resurrection, but, on the contrary, intending to embalm a lifeless body. Not finding it, they are "astonished in their mind." An angel tells them what has happened, and reminds them that Jesus Himself had foretold it. *Then* "they remember His words," and "run with fear and great joy to tell the disciples."* It was manifestly impossible that Mary should have been one of these; Catholic piety could never endure to think of Mary as despising, forgetting, or misinterpreting the words of Christ.

Next, we are told of Peter and John, when they had visited the empty sepulchre, that "as yet they knew not the Scriptures, that Jesus must rise again from the dead."† Even when Mary Magdalene and the other women told all the things they had heard from the Angels to the eleven, "their words seemed to the Apostles to be idle tales, and they did not believe them." The Queen of the Apostles must not be confounded with these. "In her the Word of God had dwelt corporally: how, then, could the Scrip-

* St. Luke xxiv. 4—8; St. Matt. xxviii. 8.
† St. John xx. 9.

tures be wanting to her, which all were only the utterances of that same Word?"*

The two disciples journeying towards Emmaus, Christ upbraided as "foolish and slow of heart to believe."† Such a censure from the lips of Eternal Truth could never fall on the Virgin most faithful, Virgin most prudent, whose blessedness had been declared long since by one "filled with the Holy Ghost," precisely on this very account, "because she believed." When He appeared in the midst of the eleven, "they were troubled and frighted, and supposed they had seen a spirit."‡ When next they saw Him, on the following Sunday, the incredulity of St. Thomas was rebuked, and removed, by means too well known to need repetition here. To others again, Jesus gave sensible proofs of the reality of His Resurrection by eating and drinking in their presence, by allowing them to touch His Sacred Body, and the like.§ Yet spite of this multiplication of witnesses, even at the end of the forty days, though some adored, others still doubted, and "He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures."‖

* Rup. Tuit. in Cant. Cant. lib. i. init.
† St. Luke xxiv. 25. ‡ St. Luke xxiv. 37.
§ Acts i. 3. ‖ St. Luke xxiv. 45.

Of course every one feels that it was precisely this incredulity, this ignorance, this slowness of heart to believe, which rendered the subsequent testimony of these same Apostles so convincing, for the conversion and confirmation of others. They declared that "which they had heard, which they had seen with their eyes, which they had looked upon, and their hands had handled, of the word of life," and they were ready to lay down their lives for the truth of what they said; but they were also inspired by the Holy Ghost to put on record their own former want of faith as well as their imperfect knowledge of the prophecies of the Old Testament, that it might be seen how entirely they were once themselves in the same condition as those whom they now sought to persuade. But, on the other hand, who is there who does not feel that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who "kept all His words and pondered them in her heart," could not possibly have behaved as one of these; that she never stood in need of any such confirmation of her faith or enlightenment of her understanding? Who does not see, therefore, that her entire absence from these manifestations of Her risen Son is the strongest testimony to her spiritual pre-eminence?

It raises her into altogether a higher sphere of the supernatural order, a region of clear, unshaken faith, and mystical vision of God, alone worthy of her close relationship to Him. Jesus showed Himself to others, because as yet they did not really know Him as He was; they knew Him only "according to the flesh,"* not by faith; so that when His visible presence was withdrawn from them, they saw Him not at all; they knew not that He was nigh them. He did not show Himself to Mary, that is, not in the same way, because from her He had never really been absent. She was in the secret, if we may so express ourselves, and needed not that aught should be explained to her. She had no need to see, for she already believed. Hers, in a singular and pre-eminent degree, was that last Beatitude, pronounced by Jesus, as well as every other which He proclaimed during His whole mortal life, "Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed."† She saw with the eyes of faith more really and truly than others with the eyes of the flesh. "We must distinguish," says St. Bernardine of Siena,‡ "between two modes

* 2 Cor. v. 16. † St. John xx. 29.

‡ Serm. lii. art. 3, c. 3, Opera, tom. i. p. 362.

of seeing; the one is bodily, the other spiritual. The first of these is weak and uncertain; often subject to much illusion, deceit, and vanity. But the second is firm, and sure, and clear; and this is not ordinarily vouchsafed to any but the purest souls, souls truly purged and cleansed from all stain of sin. Granted, then, that by a certain most wonderful privilege of loving kindness, the most sweet Jesus chose to impart the first of these modes of seeing Him to sinners such as Mary Magdalene and the rest, yet it cannot be doubted but that the Blessed Virgin, by a most clear and certain intuition of the mind, saw and knew the Resurrection of her Son, and embraced Him with the most tender embraces of her soul."

I do not presume to pursue this subject any further, for the ground whereon we tread is holy ground; the human here borders on the Divine. If it be true that none but a saint can rightly understand or describe the life of a saint; nay, if the very highest human intelligence is too weak, and human language too imperfect, to enable us to conceive and express the visions and ecstasies, the raptures of Divine love and the intimate communion with God which are often

vouchsafed to humble and loving souls that serve Him faithfully, who could hope to penetrate the secrets of that most close and perfect communion which ever existed between the hearts of Jesus and Mary? What imagination could picture to itself the Divine colloquies and the sublime interchanges of love and confidence which must needs have passed between one and the other during so many years of the closest intercourse, ever tending to make the Mother more and more "conformable to the image of her Son,"* until at length she could exclaim, even more truly and literally than St. Paul, "I am nailed to the cross with Christ; and I live; now not I, but Christ liveth in me."†

The Blessed Virgin was, in a certain sense, almost identified with her Divine Son. St. Paul uses language of this kind even about all Christians, as though it were an essential part of the Christian life; but certainly it may be used in a far higher and quite an exceptional sense of Mary, the Mother of God and the Queen of all Saints. She, above all others, was "raised up together with Christ Jesus and made to sit together in the heavenly places."‡ Her union

* Rom. viii. 29. † Galat. ii. 20. ‡ Eph. ii. 6.

with Jesus was so intimate that it knew no interruption and admitted of no increase. She who stood at the foot of the Cross and did not for a moment cease to recognize God in Him who hung thereon, had no need to see Him again after His resurrection in order to believe in it. Her faith depended not upon sight, and could not be strengthened by it. It was never for one moment shaken on that dreary day which intervened between Good Friday and Easter-day, when all others were troubled and in doubt —and for this reason Saturday has ever been consecrated as our Lady's special day, — and therefore it needed none of those condescensions which were granted to the weakness of others. She saw, as I have said, more truly with the eyes of faith than others with the eyes of sense. They saw only now and again, from time to time and at long intervals; and even when they saw, "their eyes were sometimes held that they should not know Him."* Many did not really see at all, until they saw Him no more; until He had gone up into heaven, and the Holy Spirit had come down and opened the eyes of their understanding. Then indeed might it be said of them,

* St. Luke xxiv. 16.

as of Moses by St. Paul,* "they endured as seeing Him that is invisible." In Mary this gift had been anticipated, and therefore she stands alone; and without presuming to say when or how Jesus appeared to her, and what was the nature or the frequency of the intercourse between them during those forty days, we note the silence of the Gospels about her as a testimony to her singular pre-eminence above all the other disciples, and are content only to catch a glimpse of the mystery it conceals.

* Heb. xi. 27.

LECTURE XLV.

MARY AS A WITNESS OF THE GOSPEL.

"All these (the eleven Apostles) were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren."—*Acts* i. 14.

THIS is the account — almost the whole account, I might say—which St. Luke gives us of the way in which the Apostles spent the nine days which intervened between our Lord's Ascension and the Descent of the Holy Ghost, according to His promise, on the day of Pentecost. He tells us that after they had seen their Lord going up into heaven and received out of their sight by a cloud, they returned to Jerusalem; and when they were come into the city, they went up into an upper room, where abode Peter and John, and the rest of the Apostles; and all

these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women and Mary the Mother of Jesus and His brethren. Then, on one of these days (we are not told which) they proceeded to elect one of the disciples to succeed to the vacant place in the Apostolic college, made void by the apostasy and suicide of the traitor Judas. This election would seem to have been made in this same place, in this large upper room, which may well have contained the whole number of the disciples, "about an hundred and twenty," and it is supposed to have been the same room again, of which the Evangelist goes on to speak at the beginning of the next chapter, saying, "And when the days of the Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together in one place; and suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting; . . and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."

You will observe that Holy Scripture says no more of our Blessed Lady's share in the triumph of her Son's Ascension, than it did of her share in the joys of the Resurrection, so that the pious imaginations of the faithful have been left at liberty to invent reasons for supposing her to

have been either absent or present, according to their several tastes. Primitive tradition has not been more explicit on this subject than Holy Scripture; so it is not to be wondered at that great difference of opinion has prevailed upon it. The same question has been raised as to Mary's presence with the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, and her receipt of the gift of tongues. Here however there has been a more general opinion in favour of her presence; and I think most persons studying with attention that portion of Scripture of which I have just set before you an abridgment, would probably come to the same conclusion: if not distinctly stated, yet certainly it seems to be implied. I do not mean however to lay any stress upon it in this place, as I wish to avoid everything on which a question might fairly be raised; and I would only call your attention to the distinct mention of her by name amongst those who, in obedience to her Son's command, were waiting and praying for the coming of the Holy Ghost. She is included of course in the first general term used,—she was one of "the women;" but the sacred historian thought fit also to make mention of her separately;—"the women and Mary, the Mother of

Jesus." Grammarians teach us—what indeed must be obvious to every thoughtful mind—that where a part is named separately, or connected with the whole, it is intended to give a certain excellence or pre-eminence to that part. As when the Evangelist speaks of "Peter and the Apostles,"* the form of expression shows that he was in some way distinct from, and superior to, the rest of his companions; so here also by naming "the women, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus," a certain dignity is assigned to her which deserves at least this passing notice.

However, the great fact on which I wish to fix your attention at present is this: our Blessed Lady lived on this earth a long while after the Ascension of her Divine Son; whether the time was nine years, or fifteen, or, as others have thought, twenty-four, it matters not. Surely the fact of her having been left behind at all is somewhat strange. Jesus says that "where our treasure is, there our heart is also." Mary's "treasure" was now in heaven; why was not she herself allowed to be there also? The penitent thief on the cross did but give one testimony to the truth, did but make one act of faith, of love, and

* Acts v. 29.

of hope, and he was rewarded with a promise of immediate admission into paradise; why should Mary, the Virgin most faithful, the tender Mother, the Mother of sorrows, be left so long in the land of exile among the wayfarers of this earth, amongst the enemies of her Son, amongst His murderers and blasphemers, in a world of sin and woe? Perhaps the single fact recorded in the text may suggest an answer. Mary was to be the model, the strength, the encouragement of the Apostles, both in the great work that lay before them, and in the days of patient expectation, which were to precede that work. She had known Jesus for three-and-thirty years, they had only known Him for three; she had "kept many words, pondering them in her heart," which should now be brought forth; she was the sacred depository of many secrets, which must now be revealed; she was a spotless mirror, in which the Sun of Justice should be reflected on the Infant Church; she was, as it were, herself a living Gospel, in which the words and works, the life, the heart and mind of Jesus might be read and learnt. Let us draw out these reflections at somewhat greater length.

The great characteristic of the Apostles, con-

sidered as founders of the Church, was this; that they were to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. These were the last words which our Lord spoke upon earth before His Ascension. He told the Apostles * that they should be "witnesses unto Him in Jerusalem, and all Judæa and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth." When the Apostles proceeded to elect one into the place of the traitor Judas, this is what they said; "One must be made a witness with us of His Resurrection." When they began to preach, this is what they continually insisted upon, that they were witnesses of that which they taught.† Of course they had also a divine internal conviction of all the facts which they taught, but they preached them to the Heathen and Jewish world as witnesses. So also, when they wrote as well as spoke, they appealed to the same ground of credibility. The beloved disciple, St. John, lays the greatest possible stress upon this in the beginning of his Epistle, as though everything depended upon it.‡ St. Luke, in like manner, in the preface to his Gospel, introduces

* Acts i. 8.

† Acts ii. 32; iii. 15; v. 32; x. 39; xiii. 31.

‡ Ep. 1, i. 1—3.

himself and claims the belief of his readers, not indeed as having been an eye or ear-witness himself, but as being an accurate recorder of events which he had carefully collected from those who had been such witnesses. And of course the Apostles *were* witnesses, as they themselves say, "of all things that Jesus did and suffered in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem;" * not all indeed of everything, but all of most, and some at least of all, or nearly all. Thus, three only could testify to the Transfiguration on Mount Thabor, only one to the scene on Mount Calvary, and none at all to the Prayer and Bloody Sweat in the garden, or to the first moments of the Resurrection. And certainly—and this is the important point which I desire specially to impress upon your minds—not one could bear testimony to our Lord's private and hidden life before "He began to do and to teach;" still less could they speak, of their own knowledge, concerning that greatest and primary mystery, His Conception and Birth. This fact involves most serious considerations, not often sufficiently reflected upon, with reference to our Blessed Lady.

* Acts x. 39.

The foundation of the whole Christian religion, or rather its very essence, its sum and substance, is the doctrine of the Incarnation; the doctrine, that is, that Jesus Christ was no mere man, or the Son of a man; but that in His one Divine Person were united the two natures, of man and of God; that He was "made indeed of a woman," born of the Virgin Mary, but that He had no man for His father, having been conceived by the Holy Ghost. This is the whole of Christianity; all other doctrines flow from it as their source or cluster round it as their centre. And who was there, my brethren, that could bear testimony to this foundation, this essential corner-stone, or (as I have more truly called it) this summary of the Christian faith, without which the whole system would have no meaning or value? Clearly there was no human testimony possible, save of one only person, her in whom the mystery itself was accomplished. She alone could throw a flood of light upon that secret work of God. If in other matters the Apostles were to be witnesses to the world, in this Mary must have been a witness, and the only witness, to them; an Evangelist to the Evangelists, an Apostle of the Apostles, as some of the Doctors of the Church have called

her; or, as we sing daily in the Litany, Queen of the Apostles, their mistress, mother, and teacher.

During our Lord's life, the Apostles themselves did not know this mystery. St. Peter indeed confessed, illuminated by a special Divine revelation, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God;" and sooner or later, all the other Apostles had the same faith. Witnessing the power and the goodness of His miracles, hearing the sublime wisdom of His discourses, and His own declarations concerning Himself, they could not believe otherwise: but such belief and knowledge was necessarily indistinct and insecure, so long as they were ignorant of the fact of the Incarnation, as it really happened. We count all human knowledge as imperfect, which only comprehends the outward phenomena of things, and knows nothing of their inward essence, their causes, or manner of being what they are. The Apostles had an implicit and virtual faith in the Divinity of Jesus impressed upon their hearts by their own daily experience, so to speak, of His presence in the midst of them, yet they knew not how he was God. They saw and felt, and knew that He was man; how then could He be also God? Had the Divinity come down upon a

mere man, at that wonderful scene in the river Jordan, when St. John the Baptist and others "saw the Spirit coming down as a dove from heaven," upon that human form which "came up out of the water," "and the Spirit remained upon him"?* There came indeed at that time a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased:" but had that man been the Son of God before that hour, and from the moment of His birth? or had He only become so now by adoption, or by inspiration, or in some other mysterious way, and would He always remain so? Had this human form which they saw before them been merely filled with the Divine Presence in some special manner, which might hereafter be withdrawn again, and the man be left as any one of themselves? Or was He really no man at all, but was there only the outward appearance of a man, as Angels in olden times had sometimes taken to themselves this form for a limited time and purpose? Who and what was Jesus? They had heard him called the son of Joseph; He was commonly "supposed" to be his son, and we do not read that they had been instructed otherwise. It was only

* St. John i. 32.

after the Resurrection and Ascension that they knew the mystery of the Incarnation in a formal and explicit way; and that knowledge, humanly speaking, they could only receive from Mary. She alone had seen and heard the Angel in the mystery of the Annunciation, and from her testimony the Apostles and the Church receive it.

You will remind me that the Holy Ghost was sent down for this very purpose, "to teach all truth," and that these things therefore were revealed by Him rather than told by Mary. But you must remember that this direct action of God did not supersede the use of ordinary human means here, any more than in the case of the Inspiration of the writers of the Gospels and other parts of the Bible. God revealed to them all truth, not without, but in and through, the use of human industry and care and diligent examination. The language of St. Luke, in whose Gospel all these particulars of the Birth and Infancy of Jesus are far more fully recorded than by any other of the Evangelists, clearly points to some human testimony; and none was possible but Mary's. He says that "he has diligently attained to all things from the beginning, according as they have delivered them unto us who

from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word." Mark that significant phrase, so emphatically repeated, "from the beginning." Who was such an eye-witness "from the beginning"? None but Mary. The mystery of the Incarnation had indeed been in some measure revealed to St. Joseph by the Angel, sent to reassure him as to the spotless purity of his Spouse and to command him to take her to his home; also to St. Elizabeth at the time of the Visitation, when she exclaimed, "Whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" But both of these witnesses, there is every reason to believe, had been gathered to their rest long before the close of our Lord's life upon earth, and we may be quite certain that God did not allow these hidden things to be revealed before His Resurrection, according to His own express command with reference to the Transfiguration and other tokens of His Divinity. We repeat then, Mary was the one only witness who could speak to the very foundation of the Christian faith.

Moreover, two things are very observable with reference to this testimony of Mary. First, it is this same Evangelist (St. Luke) through whom

we receive it, who distinctly tells us on three different occasions of Mary's habit of silent observation, pondering over and treasuring up all these things in her heart, as though (which even Calvin himself has remarked) the time would one day come, when she must bring them forth and speak of them. Another Protestant commentator also* has observed that St. Luke seems to have mentioned this fact of Mary's habit of thoughtful meditation upon the words and deeds of her Divine Son and of others in His regard, precisely because she was the authority from whom he had received the narrative that he was recording. And the second observation to be made is this; that, spite of very critical circumstances that might have seemed to make it the duty of the Blessed Virgin—certainly, her interest—to speak sooner, yet she kept the secret locked up in her own breast so long as Jesus remained upon earth. Her holy spouse St. Joseph, in the inscrutable providence of God, is allowed to conceive doubts of the Virgin's chastity: yet even under this most painful trial, she opens not her mouth to reveal her Divine Maternity, but in silent patience awaits her justification from God. But

* Grotius.

now the time is come that she should speak, and the secrets of God's wisdom and power, and the hidden counsels of His love, whereof she alone of creatures had before been fully cognizant, are by her revealed to the Apostles and Evangelists, as the converters and instructors of the world. St. Ambrose remarks that it is no wonder that St. John should have spoken more clearly and more sublimely on the Divine mysteries than the other Evangelists, since he had ever at hand, to his filial charge had been entrusted, the chosen Vessel in whom those mysteries had been accomplished, "the Hall or Court (as he calls her) of the heavenly sacraments." And it is St. Luke, who was so diligent in seeking testimony from those who had been eye-witnesses from the beginning, and who cannot fail therefore to have sought in an especial manner the testimony of Mary—it is St. Luke, I say, who also, alone of the Evangelists, records at length the visit of the Angel Gabriel and his message, the Virgin's fear and the Angel's encouraging assurances; the adoration of the shepherds, the presentation in the Temple, the three days' loss and the finding again in the Temple; in a word, all the particulars of the infancy and childhood of Jesus,

and (we may add), of his forerunner also, St. John the Baptist, which Mary would have known, partly of her own knowledge and partly from what she had been told by her cousin St. Elizabeth.

What then is the lesson to be drawn from these considerations? Briefly this: you are exhorted to consider well the beautiful harmony and proportions of everything connected with our Blessed Lady's position in the Gospel record of the scheme of Man's Redemption. In the mystery of the Visitation, we have seen how our Divine Redeemer was pleased to make use of His holy Mother as His instrument in conveying the highest grace and the first-fruits of Redemption after He came upon earth, the sanctification of St. John the Baptist in his mother's womb. In the marriage-feast at Cana in Galilee, He made her the first cause and motive in the manifestation of His miraculous powers in favour of men. In other words, in the economy of grace, whilst our Lord was yet upon earth, she occupied the first place among created beings; she was the chosen channel or instrument whereby her Son vouchsafed to dispense His gifts and graces, both temporal and spiritual: and now we see that she

occupies the same place also in the economy of faith; her place is the first in the order of Gospel evidences; she is the one only witness of that mystery which is above every other, the Incarnation. "Take away her contribution to the Gospel testimony, and you find not simply a link broken, but the very fastening of the whole chain gone; not merely a gap or a break made in the structure, but the foundation gone."*

She stands immediately next to the Holy Spirit, the first and highest of all merely human witnesses to the truth of Christianity. Her place then in the upper chamber at Jerusalem and with the Apostles afterwards, her office and duties there, were strictly analogous to her place and office in the chamber of her home at Nazareth, in the stable at Bethlehem, and—as we Catholics believe—in the Church of God ever since. In Nazareth, she co-operated with the Holy Ghost for the Incarnation of the Son of God; in Jerusalem, she with Him proclaims and manifests that great mystery to the world. In Nazareth, the Holy Spirit came down upon her, and she was

* Cardinal Wiseman's Essays, vol. i. p. 591, where this subject is fully treated, and whence we have borrowed *largely* in this Lecture.

made the Mother of our God; in Jerusalem, the same Holy Spirit comes down upon her, and she is made in a certain sense the Mother of our faith. "Your voice," says an ancient and pious interpreter of Holy Writ, "was to the Apostles the voice of the Holy Spirit; whatever was necessary to each by way of supplement or testimony, for the confirmation in their minds of what they had received from the Holy Ghost, they received, O blessed Virgin, from your sacred mouth. You were, as it were, His interpreter. You are the Mother of our faith." *

* Rupert. Abb. Tuit. in Cant. Cant. lib. i. p. 6, de Div. Off. lib. vii. c. 25.

LECTURE XV.

HONOUR DUE TO MARY.

"If any man minister to Me, him will My Father honour."—*St. John* xii. 26.

MY chief object in these Lectures has been to remove all those prejudices against Catholic belief and practice, with reference to the Blessed Virgin, which profess to be founded either upon the testimony or the silence of Holy Scripture. To this end I have set before you all that the Evangelists have said about her, and considered all the objections which are based upon what they have *not* said; and I think you will bear me witness that I have omitted nothing which a well-instructed Protestant would have urged against us. It remains to say a few words about the conclusions which legitimately flow from these

considerations, and then to commend the whole subject very earnestly to your thoughts and prayers.

The sum and substance of Catholic doctrine upon the point before us may be briefly stated thus; that as belief in the Divine Maternity and incomparable sanctity of Mary is essential to the integrity of Christian doctrine, so an affectionate devotion towards her is an essential part of Christian worship. The first of these propositions will scarcely be disputed by those whom I am addressing; moreover, I have already had an opportunity of enlarging upon it.* But it is the second at which many will take offence, and which I am anxious therefore to develop more fully.

And first let me explain what is meant by *worship* in general. Worship, in the true sense of the word, means simply honour—a sense which it still retains when we address public magistrates as Worshipful, or worthy of honour, and when a husband promises worship (in the Protestant Marriage-service) to his wife; and though in modern times it has come to be confined exclusively, or nearly so, to religious honour, it will help us to gain a truer knowledge of the subject,

* Lecture III.

if we consider it for a moment in its strict and original sense. Worship then, or honour, or reverence, or respect—call it by what name you please, provided only that you retain the sense; worship or honour—in all cases and under all circumstances, rests upon these two things; a judgment of the understanding as to the excellence and dignity of the object to be honoured, and an act of the will whereby we freely determine to regulate our conduct in accordance with that judgment; and then these two acts, of our will and of our understanding, naturally go on to manifest themselves in some outward and visible act, which is, as it were, the external sign or clothing whereby our internal judgment and purpose may be made known to all whom it concerns. Hence it follows that worship of some kind, in this general sense of the word, is an absolute necessity of our nature. Men, if they are reasonable beings at all, cannot choose but judge of the different objects proposed to them, and prefer one thing to another according to that judgment; neither will they be restrained, excepting by violence and for a special purpose, from manifesting that judgment or preference by some external acts. And hence it is that men

give honours spontaneously to great heroes and public benefactors. Those arches and statues and other monuments which the admiration and gratitude of mankind is so continually raising to distinguished merit, are a species of worship, in the sense in which it has been now explained.

Since worship then is founded on our estimate of excellence, it follows that as there are many different kinds of excellence, so there are also many different kinds of worship. For instance (to pass by others that do not here concern us), there is a manifest difference, which none can mistake, between excellence in the order of nature and excellence in the order of grace. It is one thing to be very strong or very brave, very clever or very learned, and another to be very good and holy; and each, both the clever man and the good man, will have his little circle of worshippers, so to speak. In other words, there is one kind of worship, which is merely civil or secular, which we call honour, and which we pay to merits and perfections that are purely natural, within the compass of man's unassisted powers; and there is another worship which is now more properly so called, and which we pay to gifts and qualities of holiness that are supernatural, that proceed

from God and lead to God. But both the one and the other flow from the same principles, and rest upon the same foundation; viz. our natural desire to do honour to that which is excellent and worthy of honour.

And here therefore it is obvious to inquire why it is that men, who would think it a great dereliction of duty, and a real disgrace, to be wanting in any act of civil worship, as we have called it, to those to whom it is due, should yet be so negligent and careless in paying, nay, rather so obstinate in refusing to pay, religious worship to those to whom that is due. They can recognize civil or natural worth of any kind, wherever they see it, whether in science or in politics, in literature or in the fine arts; and they would keep festivals, set up statues, build monuments, and otherwise expend both time and money in commemorating it, whilst yet they grudge every expenditure of either the one or the other, and count it unnecessary and wasteful, perhaps even superstitious, if it be intended to perpetuate the memory or celebrate the honour of religious worth. Thus you will remember how, not long since, all England was roused from one end to the other to do its utmost in honour of our great

national poet, Shakspeare, on the occasion of the tercentenary of his birthday. The great centre of attraction was the town in which he had been born; and amongst other modes of honouring his name, an address was read from the Germans to the English, by one of the most distinguished linguists of the day, a Professor of Languages in the University of Oxford. The address had been carefully composed; it was eloquent and enthusiastic, as befitted the occasion, and the following passage from it very happily illustrates what I wish just now to impress upon you. The address is speaking of the number of strangers who had been brought together from great distances to the celebration of the festival at Stratford, and observes that when a man looks at "that small house, in a small street of a small town of a small island, and then thinks of the world-embracing, world-quickening, world-ennobling spirit that burst forth from that small garret, he has learnt a lesson and carried off a blessing for which no pilgrimage would have been too long. Though the great festivals which in former days brought together people from all parts of Europe to worship at the shrine of Canterbury exist no more, let us hope, for the sake of England more than for the sake

of Shakspeare, that this will not be the last Shakspeare festival in the annals of Stratford-on-Avon. In this cold and critical age of ours, the power of worshipping, the art of admiring, the passion of loving what is great and good are fast dying out. May England never be ashamed to show to the world that she can love, that she can admire, that she *can worship*"—you see they do not even shrink from the very word—" the greatest of her poets. May Shakspeare live on in the love of each generation that grows up in England! May the youth of England long continue to be nursed, to be fed, to be reproved and judged by his spirit!"

I do not quote this passage in order to censure the enthusiasm of the writer and the large body of persons whom he represented, and the still larger number who received the address with every token of approbation: at the same time I cannot help observing, that if we had used similar language about any great saint, or the Queen of Saints herself, all the champions of Protestantism in the kingdom would have publicly denounced our idolatry, declaring that they needed no further testimony, but condemned us out of our own mouths.

How is this to be accounted for, except it be by the sensual materialism of men; that they walk by sight, and not by faith; that their whole hearts and affections are set on sensible and visible things, and things excellent in the order of nature; but that they have no true faith in, or love for, things invisible and spiritual, in the order of grace? Honour to whom honour is due: and if it is reasonable and praiseworthy to keep anniversary dinners, to make speeches and to write books, to build public monuments, to erect statues and to found institutions in honour of great poets, great warriors, or great statesmen, why should it be counted so vain and foolish a thing to do the same in honour of great Saints?

Will it be said that men abstain from paying this kind of religious worship to the Saints, only lest they should thereby be robbing a jealous God of that honour and worship which are His? To say so, is to argue a most complete ignorance both of the worship that is due to God and of the true meaning and value of our own daily acts. *All* honour and praise are due to God, and none at all is due to anything else in the world, considered as distinct from God, because they are the *mere creatures* of His hand, and what-

ever beauty or excellence they may have, it is only His gift. If we honour any creature in the world, no matter what it is, without any relation whatever to God, we are so far guilty of dishonouring God, for we are giving to the creature what is due only to the Creator. And this is what men are doing all day long, and every day of their lives, and they have no scruple at all about it. They can spend all their time, their thoughts and affections, upon science, literature, or the fine arts, or upon honours, pleasures, and riches, upon anything and everything in this world, and it never seems to occur to them that they are in any way interfering with, or derogating from, God's honour and glory; yet all the while they are really living in the daily practice of a species of idolatry. But to love and honour the works of God, *because* they are the works of God and show forth His excellence and goodness, is so far from being idolatry that it is one of the most effectual preservatives against idolatry, because, even in the love and admiration of the creature, it keeps the heart and mind fixed on the Creator. God is to be honoured in all His works. We cannot really love and honour Him *with* all our heart and soul and mind and

strength, except we do this. It is quite natural to us, that when our hearts are filled with love and honour and respect for any man, that love and honour should overflow also upon all his works, upon each in proportion to its nearness and dearness to the man himself. Nothing is more comon than to hear it said that we love or value such a thing entirely for the sake of the man who made it; and certainly, to despise, or to refuse to honour, the work, is to dishonour the workman. And hence the Saints, whose hearts were full of the love of God, have loved and honoured every created thing as God's work. To them the very worm of the earth, the insect of an hour, the trees and forests, and all created things, have an untold value, and become the objects of their interest, admiration, and love, for the sake of Him who made them. And shall not they too, in their turn, themselves receive honour and admiration which they have so freely bestowed, seeing that they are themselves the very noblest of God's creatures, and show forth His honour and glory exceedingly?

The works of God in the order of grace are above His works in the mere order of nature; and among the works of His grace, the Saints

are the greatest, and it is in them, therefore, especially, that we can honour God: and since the Saint *is* a Saint only by what he receives from God, all the honour we give him, however high it may be, redounds necessarily to the honour and glory of God, Whose work he is. We honour the Saints, only because they have been such eminent servants of God, and by Him have been received as His friends.* "To me," says holy David,† "Thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honourable;" and our Lord Himself whilst yet upon earth gave a promise to His disciples, saying, "If any man minister to Me, him will My Father honour." We are satisfied then that we are only doing God's will, and offering Him an acceptable service, when we celebrate the praises of the Saints, keep festivals, erect statues, sing hymns, or otherwise pay honour to the Saints; for "this honour is he worthy of, whom the king Himself hath a mind to honour."‡ We honour the King by thus honouring his ministers. It is Jesus who is the Master of the Apostles, Teacher of the Evangelists, Strength of Martyrs, Light of Confessors, Purity of Virgins, and Crown of all Saints.

* *St. John* xv. 14. † Ps. cxxxviii. 17. ‡ Esther v. 11.

It is commonly said in answer to these arguments, that, however sound and unimpeachable in theory, yet honour paid to the Saints is sure practically to degenerate into idolatry, for that men will forget that they were only the ministers and instruments of God, and will come to praise and venerate them for their own sakes. It is in vain that we refer these objectors to our Catechisms and other books of instruction, or appeal to the experience of Catholic Christendom: they refuse to listen to our testimony or to believe in the practical appreciation of the distinction we have pointed out; they quote hymns or prayers in which it seems to them that the distinction has been lost sight of, and they insist upon interpreting these in the hardest and most literal manner. How I wish such persons could be persuaded to study some of the hymns of praise of great heroes or heroines which are to be found in the Bible, and to examine how easily and naturally the honour of God and the honour of His Saints (for such, for our present purpose, we may consider these heroes to have been) are there made to blend together in the same psalm of joy and thanksgiving. Look at Judith, for example, returning to her countrymen after

the slaughter of Holofernes. "All ran to meet her, from the least to the greatest; and lighting up lights they all gathered round about her; and she said, Praise ye the Lord our God, who hath not forsaken them that hope in Him, and by me His handmaid He hath fulfilled His mercy, which He promised to the house of Israel, and He hath killed the enemy of His people by my hand this night. . . . Give all of you glory to Him because He is good, because His mercy endureth for ever. And they all adored the Lord, and said to her, The Lord hath blessed thee by His power, because by thee He hath brought our enemies to nought. And Ozias the prince of the people of Israel, said to her, Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the most high God, above all women upon the earth. Blessed be the Lord who made heaven and earth, Who hath directed thee to the cutting off the head of the prince of our enemies; because He hath so magnified thy name this day, that thy praise shall not depart out of the mouth of men who shall be mindful of the power of the Lord for ever. . . . And all the people said, Amen, Amen." Is this a hymn in honour of Judith, or of God? or is it not rather in honour of both,—*of the* one as the Almighty and All-merciful, from

whom alone cometh every good and perfect gift; and of the other, as His chosen instrument? Compare with this the *Magnificat* of the Blessed Virgin: she begins, "My soul doth magnify the Lord;" but this does not prevent her singing also in the same hymn, "Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." Again, the author of the Book of Ecclesiasticus, wishing to show forth the greatness and glory of God, begins by enumerating some of the principal works of the creation; *e. g.* "The firmament on high is His beauty; the sun when he appeareth showing forth at his rising, an admirable instrument the work of the Most High. . . Great is the Lord that made him . . . and the moon in her season . . . and the glory of the stars is the beauty of heaven, the Lord enlighteneth the world on high . . . Look upon the rainbow and bless Him that made it, it is very beautiful in its brightness." And so he continues, through clouds and winds, thunder and snow, the seas, and "the variety of beasts, and of all living things;" and then, conscious of his inability to praise God in a way that shall be really adequate to His glory, he says, "We shall say much, and yet shall want words; but the sum of our words is, He is all. What

shall we be able to do to glorify Him? for the Almighty Himself is above all His works. The Lord is terrible, and exceeding great, and His power is admirable. Glorify the Lord as much as ever you can, for He will yet far exceed, and His magnificence is wonderful. Blessing the Lord, exalt Him as much as you can; for He is above all praise. When you exalt Him, put forth all your strength, and be not weary; for you can never go far enough. Who shall see Him and declare Him? and who shall magnify Him as He is from the beginning?" No one surely can suspect the author of these magnificent passages, of indifference to the glory of God. If ever any man had a just sense of God's greatness, and "feared to transfer the honour of his God to a man, and to adore any one except his God,"* it would have been such a writer as this; yet out of his very anxiety to "magnify God as He is," he goes on immediately, "Let us now praise men of renown, and our fathers in their generation. The Lord hath wrought great glory through His magnificence from the beginning;" and then he declares the praises of Enoch and Noe, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses also and Aaron, and all the

* Esther xiii. 14.

famous men of Israel, down to his own time. Did these praises of famous men obscure the glory of God? or did they not rather illustrate and magnify it, since their strength and wisdom and goodness had only been His gifts?

In the same way, if you were to look through the hymns of the Church, appointed to be used on the festivals of the Saints, you would find that some indeed were addressed directly to God and others to the Saints themselves; but you would find none whose burden and conclusion were not always the same, — an ascribing of honour and glory to Jesus, or to the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, as the One only source of Truth, Beauty, and Holiness, "to whom alone benediction and honour and glory and power for ever and ever."* Or take the most popular of Marian devotions, one which is a very byword of scorn against us,—the Rosary, the "telling our beads;" is it a devotion in honour of our Divine Lord or of our Blessed Lady? It is called the Psalter of the Blessed Virgin, and a great many Hail Marys are said in the course of it; yet as we recite the several decades, what are all the mysteries set before us for meditation, but the successive

* Apoc. v. 13.

events in the life of Jesus—His Infancy and Manhood, His Passion and His Glory? Nor would it be difficult to show, though of course in a less striking degree, that the same principle runs through all our devotions to the Saints. "God is wonderful in His Saints," and we celebrate His glory and magnify His Holy Name by singing their praises no less than when we are paying acts of homage directly to Himself.

The Church, however, is not satisfied merely to celebrate the praises of the Saints, she would have us also look to them as examples. And here too the voice of murmuring may be sometimes heard, and we are accused of interfering with the rights of God, and putting the creature in the place of the Creator. We are told that it had been said to the children of Israel under the old law, "Be ye holy, because I the Lord your God am holy;"* and that our Blessed Lord also, in the Sermon on the Mount, proposed God as our model, saying, "Be ye perfect, as your Heavenly Father also is perfect. Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful."† This is true; and of course the attempt to copy this Divine Model has been rendered much more easy since the Incar-

* *Levit.* xix. 2. † St. Matt. v. 48; St. Luke vi. 36.

nation than it was before; first, because by it God has been (as it were) rendered visible, since, as our Lord says, "He that seeth Me, seeth the Father also;"* and secondly, because, having assumed our human nature, Jesus became our example in meekness, humility, patience, obedience, self-denial, and a number of other virtues which constitute the chief excellence of man, but which could not possibly find a place in God, as He is in Himself. Nevertheless, had nothing more been done than this, it would always have remained open to man to plead as an excuse to his own conscience for not attempting this work of imitation, the infinite distance between his own weakness and corruption, and the spotless purity and resistless strength of the God-Man. God therefore of His great goodness has provided us with other models, merely human, which may help and encourage us in the work of our sanctification, and against which man's weakness and cowardice cannot so easily object. Thus, St. Paul does not hesitate to hold up his own conduct as a model, to several of those to whom he wrote. To the Thessalonians† he speaks of "giving himself as a pattern unto them to imi-

* *St. John* xiv. 9. † Ep. 2, iii. 9.

tate him;" to the Philippians,* "Be followers of me, brethren, and observe them who walk so as you have our model;" and still more distinctly to the Corinthians,† "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ." And Ecclesiastical History in all ages is full of instances, showing the great power which the lives of the Saints have had in the production and formation of sanctity in others. It is not to be wondered at then, that the Church should bid us look to the Saints as our models, that so, being encouraged by the sight of what God's grace has done in others, mere men and women like ourselves, we might the more easily be persuaded to exert ourselves to do the same; and this therefore is another mode of honouring the Saints, which the Church has always greatly insisted upon.

There is a beautiful passage in an old heathen author,‡ about striving to copy the virtues of a deceased relative, which is very applicable to our present subject. He has just given the account of the life and death of his hero, when he breaks off from the style of narration, and apostrophizes the deceased in these terms:—"If the spirits of the just live in another world, if (as wise men

* iii. 17. † Ep. 1, xi. 1. ‡ Tacitus, Vita Agricolæ, in fin.

think) great souls do not perish with the bodies they have tenanted, I would say to thee, Sleep on and take thy rest in the happy repose which thou hast merited; and bid us thy family cease from useless regrets and womanish lamentations, and rather turn to the contemplation of thy virtues, which are no fit subject for lamentation, and which it would be impious to tarnish by a tear. Bid us honour thee by our admiration, and, so far as our weakness will allow, by our imitation, rather than by the empty sounding forth of thy praises. This is the only true honour, the best tribute of duty and affection which thy relatives can pay thee. Let us so venerate thy memory as to go over in our thoughts all thy words and deeds, and embrace the form and features of thy mind rather than of thy body—not that I would forbid images of marble or of bronze to recall thee to our memories; only they are weak and perishable, like the faces and figures they represent; whereas the form of the mind never dies. This, therefore, we can seize and reproduce, not by the work of other hands and in some other material, but ourselves, and in our own characters."

The noble exhortation which this Pagan writer

here gives to the surviving relatives of the subject of his panegyric, is precisely that which the Church gives to all her children with reference to *her* heroes, the Saints, and especially Mary, Queen of Saints. She does not forbid the making of images in their honour, whether in marble or bronze, or yet costlier material; neither does she condemn the homage of our praise, whether in sermon, prayer, or hymn; on the contrary, she gives every encouragement to these and any other outward tokens of veneration and honour; but what she desires far more earnestly and values far more highly is that her children should copy their likeness inwardly in their hearts. This is true devotion to Mary, the most acceptable tribute of our duty and affection. And whereas other Saints are models, some to one class of persons, some to another, Mary is a model to all, because she is a perfect reflection of the virtues of her Divine Son. "One is the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, and another the glory of the stars; and star differeth from star in glory."* Jesus is the Sun of Justice; Mary is its mirror,† "fair as the moon," shining with

* 1 Cor. xv. 41.

† Litany of Loreto, Speculum Justitiæ.

a bright but borrowed light, not too dazzling for human eyes: the Saints are the stars, and one Saint differs from another Saint in graces as in glory. All, indeed, derive whatever goodness and beauty they have from their resemblance to this or that feature in the life and character of Jesus; but none so perfectly resembles Him as Mary His Mother. And whereas all the honour we pay to any of the Saints is ultimately referred to God as the sole Author of that for which they are honoured, the honour we pay to Mary is immediately and pre-eminently so referred from the necessity of the case, because there is nothing in her history which the human mind can easily lay hold of and detach from God. Other Saints have been more or less distinguished by wonderful actions or clearly supernatural conditions of soul or body, calculated to impress the imagination and to attract admiration. They have prophesied, or lived in ecstasies, or practised extraordinary mortifications, or wrought great miracles, or established large works of charity which have conferred signal benefits on mankind and won for them the grateful admiration of a whole diocese, or country, or province, so that their statues have been welcomed, perhaps, on

the public squares, even before they have been placed upon the altar. In all these cases, the personal facts of their history have been such as to reflect honour and glory upon them, even from a merely human point of view, and there has been a proportionate danger that worldly men should still continue to honour their memories for their own sakes and without any thought of God. But in Mary there was nothing of all this; take away her relationship to Christ, leave God out of sight, and what is there to speak of, to admire, and to honour in her? One might almost say there was no life, no death, no acts of any kind: for all that is known of her is bound up, inseparably bound up, with the mysteries of the Life of Christ; she forms an essential part of them, draws all her greatness from them, and at the same time manifestly confesses her entire dependence upon them. Her relationship to God is the whole account of her being. She is simply the Mother of God. Apart from this, she is nothing but meekness, humility, gentleness, silence, faith, love, obedience, resignation, and an absolute conformity to the will of God. What danger is there that the contemplation of virtues like these will draw away the heart from

God, and fix it sinfully on a creature? Jesus required of His disciples that they should take up their cross and follow Him; and who ever followed Him as closely and faithfully as Mary from the crib to the Cross—Bethlehem to Calvary? What danger, then, if we seek to follow Mary, that we shall be led away from Jesus? Finally, He Himself summed up the lessons of His Life in a single word, bidding us "learn of Him, because He was meek and humble of heart;" and might not the lesson of Mary's life be summarized in the very same words, since, spite of her high dignity and singular privileges, it was so humble that the eyes of the world even now fail to distinguish it?

LECTURE XVI.

INVOCATION OF MARY.

"Pray one for another, that you may be saved; for the continual prayer of a just man availeth much."—*St. James* v. 16.

WE have spoken of the duty of honouring our Blessed Lady by celebrating her praises and imitating her virtues; but there remains yet another part of Catholic devotion towards her which requires to be explained and justified,—I mean our frequent invocations of her, our continual appeals to her intercession with God in our behalf. These, it is said, involve a practical denial of the sovereign power or goodness of God, to Whom alone we should have recourse in all our necessities. What, then, is Invocation? and why do we invoke the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints? To invoke is to call to our aid, when some want, or danger, or difficulty oppresses us, to which we feel our own

weakness to be unequal. A poor man invokes, or calls out for, the help of the rich man; the weak, of the strong; the ignorant, of the learned. Do they err in so doing? Are they justly chargeable with impiety and denial of God's goodness or power when they do these things? since it is certain that every good gift cometh from God; that He alone is abundantly sufficient to supply all our wants, and that He is ever more ready to give than we to ask. Why, then, does not the beggar turn only to Him in his distress, and ask Him to supply his needs, as He supplied those of Elias of old? or why does not the sick man look only to Him, Who is the author of life and death, and Who could heal by a single word? Surely, because all mankind, whilst fully acknowledging that "no man can receive anything except it be given him from heaven,"* yet recognize this other truth also, that it is God's good pleasure, in the ordinary way of His Providence, to distribute His gifts, not immediately from His own hand, but through the instrumentality of others; thus making us dependent upon one another and uniting all together in the closest bonds of fellowship as one body.

* St. John iii. 27.

But it is objected, though this may be very true with reference to the goods of this life, health of body, food, raiment, and the like, yet in all spiritual matters we depend on God alone; none can intervene here between man and his Maker; or, at least, there can be no necessity for such intervention. But how can you be sure of this? The same God is the Author of Nature and of grace, and why should they not be subject to the same laws? Is it not more reasonable to expect that they should be so than that they should not? But—better than any mere speculation and conjecture—let us look into Holy Scripture, and see whether we cannot there find some direct information on the subject. Open the very first book of the Bible,* and you will find the story of a king who offends God by taking another man's wife. It is true, indeed, that he did not know that Sarah was Abraham's wife; so far, he had acted with a sincere heart; nevertheless there was that in his conduct which offended God, and which He determined to punish. But "Abimelech prayed to God, and said, Lord, wilt Thou slay a nation that is ignorant and just? And God said, Restore the

* Genesis xx.

man his wife, for he is a prophet."—I have already told you it was Abraham,—and God adds, "And Abraham shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live." And by-and-by at the end of the chapter we read, "When Abraham prayed, God healed Abimelech and his wife." What is this but intercession of the Saints in patriarchal times? If you ask why it is that God did not choose to grant Abimelech's own prayer taken alone, but insisted that it should be strengthened by the prayer of Abraham, we are silent, for "Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His Counsellor?"* We are only concerned to show the fact, that God made the intercession of the prophet an essential condition of His forgiveness of the king. Nor is this the only instance of the same law which has been recorded for our instruction. You remember the history of Job and his three comforters; What was the end of that history? "The Lord said to Eliphaz, My wrath is kindled against thee and against thy two friends, because you have not spoken the thing that is right before Me, as my servant Job hath. Take unto you, therefore, seven oxen and

* Rom. xi. 34.

seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer for yourselves a holocaust; *and my servant Job shall pray for you; his face I will accept,* that folly be not imputed to you. . . . So they did as the Lord had spoken to them, and the Lord accepted the face of Job. The Lord also was turned at the penance of Job, when he prayed for his friends."* Again, God laments, by the mouth of His prophet Ezechiel, that there is no Saint to intercede for His people, to intervene between their sins and His just anger;† and at another time He says that even though there were Saints to intercede, yet so great is His anger, He would not forgive.‡

But why multiply examples? A single undoubted instance of God's will is sufficient; for "He is not a man that He should change, nor the Son of man that He should repent;" and since it is quite clear that under the old law God attributed much weight to the prayers of holy men interceding for others, we are sure that it must be so still, unless we are told to the contrary. Accordingly we find St. Paul earnestly soliciting the prayers of the Roman Christians, saying,

* Job xlii. 7, 8, 10. † xxii. 30.
‡ Ezech. xiv. 14—16; and Jer. xv. 1.

"I beseech you, brethren, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the charity of the Holy Ghost, that you help me in your prayers for me to God,"* and again to the Thessalonians,† "Brethren, pray for us." And, indeed, who is there, even of those who are without the Church, who is at all in earnest in his endeavours to save his soul, and has not asked for the prayers of his friends whom he believed to be good and holy men, acceptable to God? and in proportion to his estimation of their piety, is the value he sets upon their intercession. And does he fear that by so doing he is offending God; robbing Him of any honour and glory that is His due? On the contrary, he knows that he is obeying God's own command, Who expressly bids us "pray one for another, that we may be saved; because the continual prayer of a just man availeth much."

But if this be so, if it is clearly God's will that we should ask the prayers of our fellow-men, who are still affected by the infirmities of the flesh, and therefore liable to fall away from grace and to lose their souls, why should we hesitate to ask the prayers also of the Saints in heaven who see God face to face? Is it because

* Rom. xv. 30. † Ep. 2, iii. 1.

the Saint is not living but dead? To give such a reason as this, were, in fact, to express a doubt as to the immortality of the soul. The Church teaches us to call the day of a Saint's death or departure out of this world his birthday, implying that he only then truly begins to live. God is called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."* We do not lose our friends when they die; we gain them, and gain them for ever, if they die in the Lord. Not for us do the glorious army of martyrs, the bright choir of virgins and purified souls who honoured their Lord in the flesh, sleep now in the cold grave, or lie torpid in some unknown indefinite place. They are already full of life, a life of joy, contentment, and power, in comparison with which what we call life is only a living death.

Is it, then, that the Saints have ceased to love us? "We ought not to fear," says St. Augustine,† "that the Saints will forget us, now that they drink of Thee, O God, Who art ever mindful of us." "Far be from us," says St. Bernard,‡ "the thought that that love which we have seen so

* St. Matt. xxii. 32. † Confess. ix. 3.
‡ De Obitu Malachiæ.

active upon earth should be lessened or destroyed in heaven, where the Saints drink at the very source and fountain-head of that love of which here upon earth they had only a few drops. The love of those who have gone before us and passed through the valley of the shadow of death, cannot fail, for love is stronger than death. Yes, my Brethren, the breadth of heaven enlarges men's hearts, not contracts them; fills them with more love, not empties them of what they had before. In the light of God, the memory is brightened and strengthened, not obscured; what was not known is now learnt; not what *was* known, unlearnt; in a word, it *is* Heaven and not earth:" and heaven is not a land of separation or of forgetfulness. There is but one Body of the faithful, whether in heaven or upon earth, and Jesus Christ is their Head, and through Him there is a communion between all the members of His mystical Body. Those who have entered into their rest have not thereby ceased to be our brethren and to love us. Neither have they ceased, on the other hand, to love God and to have an interest in all that concerns His honour and glory, and the salvation of men's souls.

Is it then that they have lost their power, and

that, now they are perfected in glory, God will no longer hear their prayers and accept their intercession? What more absurd! We have seen that it is not dead men we invoke, when we invoke the Saints, but living men; and they are shorn of none of their powers by being beatified in heaven, but rather have all their powers increased and multiplied a hundredfold. They were pleasing to God and had power with Him by their prayers, whilst yet they were struggling here upon earth: are they less pleasing to Him now because they are more perfect? and weaker because they have conquered and are crowned?

But it is their knowledge you misdoubt? You think they cannot see or know your wants. Whilst here upon earth, though separated by thousands of miles perhaps, yet the genius of man had invented means of communication whereby the requests of distant friends might be made known to one another; but now that they are in Heaven and released from the bonds of the body, God has no power to reveal to them what they desire to know. Whilst here upon earth, it was given to many of them to have visions of heaven; but now that they are in heaven, they have no means of having visions of

earth. Whilst here upon earth, they "saw through a glass in a dark manner;" but now that they are in heaven, they "see face to face:"* nevertheless, though now they see and know God so perfectly, and God sees and knows all things,—yea, and all things are *in* God,—yet they remain blind and ignorant. Whilst here upon earth, it was given to prophets to know the future; in heaven, it is denied to the Saints to know the present. Whilst here upon earth, Eliseus, though absent in the body, knew all that his servant Giezi was doing at a distance, and he gave the king of Israel information of all that passed in the Syrian camp;† but now that he is in heaven and is no longer affected by all those accidents of time and space which so cramp and hinder the operations of our minds through the weakness of our bodies, he has no such power and is incapable of receiving it.

Need we say more to expose the strange unreasonableness of Protestant opinion upon this subject? If anything is still wanting to the cogency of our arguments, it is to be found surely in the distinct testimony of Holy Scripture, which teaches us in one place that the angels in

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12. † 4 Kings v. 6.

heaven know and rejoice at the sight of a penitent sinner upon earth; and in another, that in the next world we shall be "like the angels;"* so that it is hard to understand why any Christians should take so perverse a pleasure in setting the narrowest possible limits to the knowledge and power of the glorified Saints. It is not thus that St. John speaks of them; he cannot find words to express their glory, or rather, he confesses that we do not know what it is, because it is so exceeding great; only what we *do* know goes far beyond anything we have yet said of them, for he says that they are "like God,"—not like the angels only, the archangels, the seraphim, and cherubim, or the "spirits which are before His throne," but like to God Himself. "Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God; and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is."† To the Saints God has already appeared; they have entered into His presence, and rejoice in the Beatific Vision. Shall we deny them this slight resemblance to Him whom they behold, the power of knowing all that concerns them here

* St. Matt. xxii. 30. † 1 John iii. 2.

below? The Psalmist tells us that "they shall be inebriated with the plenty of Thy house, and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure. For with Thee is the fountain of life, and in Thy light we shall see light."* But shall this light be insufficient for the discernment of their brethren's needs? They are the companions of angels, "and are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night," and "the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the Saints [*i. e.* of the faithful on earth] ascends up before God from the hand of the angel."† Are these prayers then known to the angels, but unknown to the other citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, "the spirits of the just made perfect"? ‡

There is but one answer, I think, possible, to enable a man to escape from the conclusion to which all these considerations tend; and that is, that the invocation of Saints is forbidden in Holy Writ. And accordingly this assertion is sometimes made, but it can never be proved. What the Bible and the Church forbid is the offering supreme worship to any but God alone;

* Psalm xxxv. 10. † Apoc. vii. 15; viii. 4.
‡ Heb. xii. 23.

and supreme worship consists not in prayer but in sacrifice. Thus runs the Law:—"Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God and shalt serve Him alone;" and "He that sacrificeth to the gods shall be put to death, save only to the Lord."* And the Church speaking by the Council of Trent says the same thing:—"Sacrifice may not be offered to the Saints, but only to God who crowned the Saints; wherefore the priest does not say, I offer the sacrifice to thee, O Peter, or Paul, but giving thanks to God for the victories they have won, he implores their help, that those whose memory we celebrate upon earth would vouchsafe to intercede for us in heaven;" and again, "We must pray to God to give us all good and deliver us from all evil, but to the Saints, as God's friends, to intercede for us with Him for the obtaining of all our petitions."† The very idea of a sacrifice implies that He to Whom it is offered is the Sovereign Lord and Master, that the thing offered is His, not only as to the use of it, but also as to its very substance and being, so that He has a right to change or destroy it according to His good pleasure; and for this

* *Deut.* vi. 13; Exod. xxii. 20.

† *Sess.* xxii. c. 3, de Sac. Mis. and Catech. Pars iv. c. vi. q. 3.

reason things offered in sacrifice under the Old Law were either altogether destroyed, or, where this was impossible, so changed as in fact to amount to destruction. But prayer has no such meaning at all; prayer is only another name for asking, and all men daily ask one another for such assistance as they need and others are able to supply, whether in things temporal or spiritual: nor was it ever heard that God forbade or disapproved of such petitions. Once, indeed, the base flatterers of a heathen king procured an edict to be published, that no man should ask any petition of any God or man for thirty days, save only of himself, the king; and doubtless God might, had He so willed, have made us similarly dependent upon Himself, and wholly independent one of another. But such has not been His action towards us either in civil or religious matters; on the contrary, He has knit us together in the closest bonds of fellowship and mutual dependence. More especially as Christians, He has made us members of one body, which "being compacted and fitly joined together by what every joint supplieth, according to the operation in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in cha-

rity."* And the same charity which bids us supply the wants of those of our brethren upon earth who are in need, so far as we have the power, bids the Saints in heaven to assist us, so far as they have the power; and their power is by prayer. We ask them to pray for us, not instead of praying for ourselves, but in addition to our prayers, and this, not because we mistrust God's mercy, but because we mistrust our own unworthiness. God accepts prayer and answers it, according to the dispositions with which it is offered. He has Himself taught us to value especially the prayer of a *just* man, and has even commanded such men at various times to intercede for sinners whom His justice would otherwise have punished. We know ourselves to be sinners, and therefore we seek the help of just men to intercede for us; as in matters of this world, when we wish to obtain some grace from one on whom we doubt whether we have sufficient claims to insure a favourable hearing, we try to avail ourselves of the friendly offices of another more nearly connected or more influential than we are, with him on whose will our petition really depends.

The Invocation of Saints then, and of Mary

* Eph. iv. 16.

as their Queen, is so natural a thing in itself, and so manifestly in harmony with the teaching of God's word and His government of the world, that we need say no more in its justification. It is necessary, however, that we should notice certain prayers which the Church sometimes uses both to our Blessed Lady and to other Saints, which seem to go beyond that power of intercession that we have been vindicating to them. Ordinarily, the burden of our prayers to all the Saints is *Ora pro nobis,—Pray for us;* and in the Litanies, the difference between prayer to God and prayer to His Saints, is very clearly brought out, and impressed upon the mind by the change from *Miserere nobis,—Have mercy upon us,* following each address to the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, to *Ora pro nobis,* after each name or title of a Saint. But there are some other hymns and antiphons addressed to our Blessed Lady, in which we do not scruple to ask herself immediately for gifts which we more commonly ask her to obtain for us, through her intercession, from God; using therein a very pardonable license, such as men daily avail themselves of in their intercourse with one another, and which cannot possibly be misunderstood,

where the first elements of Christian doctrine are once received and established. Indeed, if it be an error, we may justly plead that Holy Scripture itself has betrayed us into it, since it repeatedly uses a similar ellipsis, attributing to men what is not absolutely theirs, but only in a certain sense, and under certain limitations. When the lame beggar, sitting at the Beautiful gate of the Temple, asked alms of St. Peter, St. Peter boldly answered, "Silver and gold I have none, but *what I have* I give thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk."* Had he therefore this power of himself? or did he by this form of speech imply a denial of his dependence upon God? Again, St. Paul is not more guarded in his speech than St. Peter. He writes to the Romans,† that; as long as he is the Apostle of the Gentiles, he will honour his ministry, "if by any means I may save some of them;" and to the Corinthians,‡ "I became all things to all men, that I might save all." Nor is it of himself only that he so speaks; but he attributes similar power to all believers. "How knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man,

* Acts iii. 2. † xi. 13. ‡ 1 Cor. ix. 22.

whether thou shalt save thy wife ? " * Had any Catholic used such language now for the first time, about our Blessed Lady for example, and spoken of her as having saved such or such an one, there would not have been wanting those who would have raised a cry of blasphemy against such a form of speech. Through a mistaken and ignorant zeal, men, more jealous of God's honour than He is of His own, would have said that such a mode of speaking robs Jesus of something that belongs exclusively to Himself. The Church is not more cautious than Holy Scripture; or rather, Holy Scripture and the Church teach precisely the same truth, when they speak in this way; and it is an important truth which they teach; but one which finds no place in the imperfect theological systems of man's invention. It would take us too far away from our subject fully to state and develop it here; nor is it necessary. The explanation already given is abundantly sufficient for " men of good will; " the captious and those that love contention will not be persuaded.

* 1 Cor. vii. 16.

LECTURE XVII.

THE PATRONAGE OF MARY.

ALL that has been said in the last two Lectures about the honour due to the Saints has belonged to our Lady only in common with the other glorified members of Christ's Body, whilst every one knows that the Church honours Mary with a very special devotion far beyond that which she bestows on any other Saint. It is a difference of degree, however, rather than of kind; whereas the worship we offer to God is altogether different in kind from that with which we approach any of His creatures. The prayers which are addressed to one Saint might be addressed to another, and to the Queen of Saints; but they could not be addressed to God without impiety, because they suppose some higher Being to whom they are ultimately referred.

And here I might very well be content to leave *the subject* of devotion to our Blessed Lady,

having explained the three principal acts in which it consists,—prayer, praise, and imitation, and having shown the theological and scriptural ground on which it rests; viz., that honour is due to every creature for God's sake, and higher honour in proportion to the nearness of its relations to God. There are some, however, who might almost be persuaded to admit as much as this perhaps, but who nevertheless shrink from what they consider the excess of Catholic devotion to Mary, and in particular from the ordinary statements about the universality of her Patronage and about all graces being given through her intercession. Now, I am not going to examine and weigh the particular words or phrases used by this or that writer, which would be an endless and unprofitable task; but I do not think I ought to omit, in a course of Lectures like the present, a broad general statement about our Blessed Lady's powers for which anything like a general consensus of Catholic writers can be alleged, and which enters largely into the popular belief; and no one will deny that the power and extent of Mary's Patronage occupies a far more prominent place in every Catholic heart throughout the whole Church, than that of any other Saint, how-

ever eminent or however intimately connected with this or that particular place, or class, or subject. We *believe* in the Patronage of all the Saints. It is an article of the faith that they make intercession for us and are our patrons and protectors in divers ways. But the Church at large has not authorized any general solemnity for the whole body of the faithful in honour of the Patronage of any Saint, save only St. Mary and St. Joseph; thereby plainly indicating that of these she believes the power of intercession to be universal and infinite, whereas of all other Saints it is only partial and limited. In explanation of this difference, it might be enough to say generally, that its cause is twofold; partly, the higher degree of sanctity which these Saints attained above all others, and partly—what indeed is intimately connected with that sanctity, yet distinct from it—the personal relationship, so to speak, which existed between them whilst yet they were in the world, and the God-Man, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord. For we must remember that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, having once become Man, remains such for ever, and that all the relations therefore which He vouchsafed to contract with any of the

children of men here upon earth being Divine, are in a certain sense eternal. As He did not cease to be God when He came down to this earth and became Man, so neither did He cease to be man when He went back again to Heaven. His human nature remains for ever an inseparable part of Himself; and part of that nature is filial love for her whom He had chosen to be His Mother, and for him whom He did not refuse to call father, to whom He gave the authority of a father over Him. It might be enough then to rest upon this foundation our belief in the infinite might and universal extent of *their* Patronage as compared with that of any other Saints. I wish, however, with reference to our Blessed Lady—for we are not now concerned with St. Joseph—to show how naturally this belief about her position in heaven falls in with, and seems indeed almost necessarily to flow out of, what the Gospel tells us about what she said and did upon earth.

I will not repeat what has been already said about the Saints continuing to take an interest, in God's presence, in what occupied their thoughts and affections during the period of their exile, nor vindicate to them afresh their

power of assisting those in whom they take an interest. It is hard to believe that any Christian who has ever given any attention to the subject can find a difficulty in understanding why the founder of an orphanage, for example, should look for special help before the throne of God from the prayers of St. Vincent of Paul, or of an older St. Vincent,* who had laboured in the same work two centuries before; or why missionaries in heathen countries should pray to St. Francis Xavier; or those who have charge of the sick, to St. John of God; and so on, through the whole calendar of Patron Saints. For in the kingdom of God those fruits are ripened whose seeds were sown upon earth; glory is but the development and the crowning reward of grace, and as grace does not destroy but beautifies and elevates nature, so neither does glory obliterate the special fruits of grace, nor do souls lose their identity by passing through the portals of death. On the contrary, we believe that the Saints in glory retain special characteristics arising out of the works which they did in grace, and that time will thus set a mark, as it were, upon eternity. What then was the special work of Mary upon

* St. Vincent Ferrer, O. S. D.

earth? What is her special privilege in heaven? She was the Mother of Jesus; she remains the Mother of His Church. "She brought forth Jesus our Head in the flesh; she co-operates by her charity to the bringing forth us, His members, in the spirit." * And since Jesus, the Author and Giver of grace, came to us by Mary at the first, it cannot be counted anything strange if the will of God should have ordained that we should receive also through her intervention the different measures and applications of grace that are needed for our souls. "The gifts of God are without repentance;" † and God having once decreed that she should co-operate by a distinct act of her will in the giving of Jesus to men at the first, it might well be that something of the same kind was appointed to continue to the end. Let us look at the events of her life.

Next after the mystery of the Annunciation, that is, of the Incarnation itself, there followed that of the Visitation, in which, as you have already seen, Mary was made the instrument of the first act of grace of the Incarnate Saviour. The first application of the fruit of Redemption

* St. Aug. de Sancta Virginitate, vi.

† Rom. xi. 29.

in the sanctification of St. John the Baptist was by means of the voice of Mary. "Behold, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy." And do not say that this was then unavoidable, because Jesus was in Mary's womb, and could not be separated from her; for He might have performed this miracle of mercy on the Infant Baptist in silence, and at a distance. Jeremias the Prophet, for whose soul something of the same kind seems to have been done,* knew nothing of it until he was sent forth on his prophetic mission. It was done, but silently and invisibly; no outward instrument was used. God might have done the same again, had He so pleased; but He did not so please, He chose to use a human instrument, and that instrument was Mary.

Look further in the history of Jesus and Mary, when He is grown up, and is now about to begin His public ministry. He is no longer inseparable from Mary; quite otherwise; He will be now more frequently absent from her than in her company. But observe how His public ministry begins. We have seen the method He chose for

* "Before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee."—*Jer.* i. 5.

working His first miracle on the souls of men, His first spiritual work of mercy; let us now notice His first temporal work of mercy, His first miracle wrought in merely temporal matters. I need not repeat the history of the changing of water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee. You all know how Mary there asked for and obtained, for another, miraculous exercise of the Divine power of her Son. She was the cause of Jesus' first miracle being wrought. He would not have wrought it but for her. He wrought it at her intercession, in obedience to her wish.

Is there no meaning in these mysteries? Is it merely a fortuitous coincidence that Mary was the channel and instrument of the first spiritual grace, and the direct cause of the first temporal grace, granted by the Incarnate Word? And does it teach us absolutely nothing about Mary's influence with Jesus, and the power of her Intercession under the Gospel dispensation? Do not say that these two histories are wonderful facts, but isolated, mere events in history, beginning and ending in themselves, but without consequences, having no general character, resting on no principle, covering no mystery, declaring no law.

As well might you say that the pardon granted by Jesus to the overflowing love of the penitent Magdalen was a fact which concerned her alone, and gave no encouragement, was no sure ground of hope, to others who have sinned like her, and like her repented. As well might you say that the miracle of healing, which after so many apparent rebuffs Jesus granted to the poor Canaanitish woman, for her possessed daughter, was a special privilege granted to her, and teaches no general lesson upon the unfailing efficacy of perseverance in prayer. As well might you seek to strip every fact in Gospel history of its general or mysterious character, treat them as so many separate and independent facts, each standing by itself, and deny that they teach us anything about the general character of God's dealings with the children of men.

I have spoken of the miracle at Cana in Galilee as though it concerned temporal matters more than spiritual; and in itself it did so: but in its effects and consequences it was far otherwise; it was pre-eminently spiritual. For the Evangelist concludes his account of the incident with these words:—"This beginning of miracles did Jesus *in* Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory,

and His disciples believed in Him." So then the disciples owed their belief—that faith without which they could not have been saved, without which "it is impossible to please God;" they owed it,—under God, to Mary. God gave it them; for "faith is the gift of God;"* but He gave it them through Mary's intervention. It was the immediate fruit of a certain miracle wrought in their presence, which miracle was directly caused by the thoughtful, amiable "charity" of Mary. Thus are we again reminded of the saying of St. Augustine, that Mary brought forth Jesus our Head in the flesh, but that she also co-operates *by her charity* to the bringing forth of us His members in the Spirit.

Moreover, looking at this first miracle of our Lord from this point of view (which is manifestly the most true and just appreciation of it), another wide and magnificent field of contemplation as to Mary's place in the economy of man's Redemption is opened out before us, of which I must set before you the outline, hoping that you will do your best to develop it to its proper limits by study and your own meditation. "Theology," says Bossuet (from whom I take my sketch of

* Eph. ii. 8.

this subject), "recognizes three principal operations of the grace of Jesus Christ: God calls us, justifies us, and gives us perseverance. This is the beginning, the progress, and the completion of our sanctification. And in each of these three stages, the help of Jesus is necessary; but also—what, perhaps, you may not have observed in the Scriptures, but yet is clearly there—the charity of Mary is associated with each." He then goes on to show how in the Visitation, when Jesus by the mouth of Mary awakened and bestowed a great grace upon the helpless Baptist imprisoned in his mother's womb, we seem to have a lively image of God's grace awakening sinners, hitherto insensible alike to His threats and to His promises, and calling them to repentance and amendment of life; in the consequences of the miracle at the marriage-feast of Cana, we have a plain instance of the gift of justification, since thus only did the disciples believe with a full and entire faith; and, lastly, in St. John standing at the foot of the Cross, we have a representative of all faithful Christians who persevere to the end; and to them Jesus Himself gives Mary to be their Mother.

Those who have studied Holy Scripture most

deeply, and learnt something of its hidden meanings, and the lessons of instruction, and even of prophecy, which are often wrapt up in its most simple facts, will best know how to appreciate the truth and beauty of this interpretation of the Gospel incidents to which it refers; and nobody who has studied the Lives of the Saints and the History of the Church will be at a loss to supply instances in which the intervention of Mary has been distinctly manifested, both in the conversion of sinners and in their encouragement and perseverance to the end; thus confirming the interpretation suggested, by the important testimony of facts. But this is a field upon which, however tempting, we must not enter. It came legitimately within the scope of a series of Lectures upon the Gospel History of our Lady, to show how the facts which are recorded of her by the Evangelists, point her out as holding the most important place, next to Jesus, in the great work of our Redemption; it would be altogether another work to show how she has actually filled that place in the history of the Church; how the Holy Ghost, by Whose operation Jesus was conceived of the Blessed Virgin at the first has continued to use the same instru-

ment as one chief means of carrying on His work in the world; and I think it would not be difficult to show by the light of history that, next to the Cross of Christ, devotion to our Blessed Lady has been the most powerful instrument in the regeneration of the world by Christianity.

But, as I have said, this is a subject quite beyond our present scope: one word only we may be allowed to say in conclusion, that, as in the Gospels Mary appears the Mother of Jesus, and is given by Himself from His Cross to be the Mother also of His disciples, His Mystical Body, the Church, we have a right to look in the Church's devotion to her (if it is to be in harmony with the Gospel) for those characteristics of pre-eminence and universality which naturally become the position of a mother in the bosom of her family. And certainly it will not be denied that, tried by this test, Catholic devotion to Mary will not be found wanting. Other Saints may be known, loved, and honoured, only by particular classes or in particular countries; but within the limits of Catholic Christendom, Mary is loved and honoured everywhere and by all. What St. *Paul* says of our Blessed Lord, is true also of

His holy Mother. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for all are one in Christ Jesus."* She is especially beloved and honoured by women, because she *is* a woman, and because she has exalted the honour of her sex, restoring it (and more than restoring it) to its original dignity; reversing the fault of our first mother Eve and taking the initiative in the work of the Redemption, even as Eve had done in the work of our ruin; because she was also the model of her sex in all its conditions and capacities, as virgin, wife, mother, and widow,—and because she set forth in her life the most perfect example of the special virtues of woman, modesty, silence, reserve, retirement, gentleness, obedience, obscurity, and the rest. But experience shows that devotion to her is no less attractive to men; it is not possible to name any doctor or saint of the Church who has not been distinguished by a tender and filial devotion towards this heavenly Mother; it has even been made a reproach against the devotion altogether, that it is a mere matter of sentiment, imagination, and feeling, the chivalrous admiration of ideal feminine per-

* Gal. iii. 28.

fection, a generous homage paid to "the weaker vessel," as the very type of gentleness, goodness, and beauty.

Look again at the various stages of life. Jesus and Mary are the earliest names lisped by a Christian child; they bring the first ideas of the faith into the infant mind by means of that relationship which they first and most readily understand, that of mother and child. As the child grows up and the passions develop and strengthen, what more general or more effective protection against the seductions of sense and the violence of temptations than the love and veneration of this spotless model of purity, the Blessed Virgin? How many wrecks have not been avoided at this most critical season of life by keeping the eye and the heart steadily fixed upon this bright Star of the Sea? And amid the multiplied interests of maturer years, what stronger anchor of the soul to heavenly things, who is more frequently invoked than her of whom "it has not heard at any time that any one ever had recourse to her in vain"? Finally, the very picture of devout old age is of one "telling his beads." Old age renews its youth at the altars of Mary; it is ready with aged Simeon

to sing its *Nunc dimittis,* as he did when he received Jesus from her arms: it cries out, after the weary exile of this life, "Show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

Look again at the various intelligences of men. Contrast the deep learning and subtle intellect of the theologian with the simple unquestioning faith of the humble peasant who knows nothing beyond his catechism. How wide asunder they seem to stand; yet in devotion to Mary they meet as brothers, and it would be hard to say which surpasses the other in this particular. It is easy to see this by watching the devotions of the Catholic poor on the one hand, and studying the works of the most eminent doctors of the Church on the other, who seem to have inherited, as it were, the privilege first bestowed on St. John, of having Mary in their holy keeping. Indeed, our very adversaries bear testimony to this; for their objections against devotion to our Blessed Lady are usually directed not so much against the formal decrees or authorized prayers and hymns of the Church, as against what they are pleased to call the superstition of the vulgar or the extravagances of theological writers.

The poor and the great ones of the earth, both alike bend the knee in loving homage to Mary; the poor because she was poor, the wife of a carpenter, labouring for her daily bread; the rich and mighty, because she was highly exalted, of royal lineage, and the Mother of One Whose kingdom was to have no end. She was the most humble, and therefore the most exalted of human creatures, and thus she became a perfect model for both.

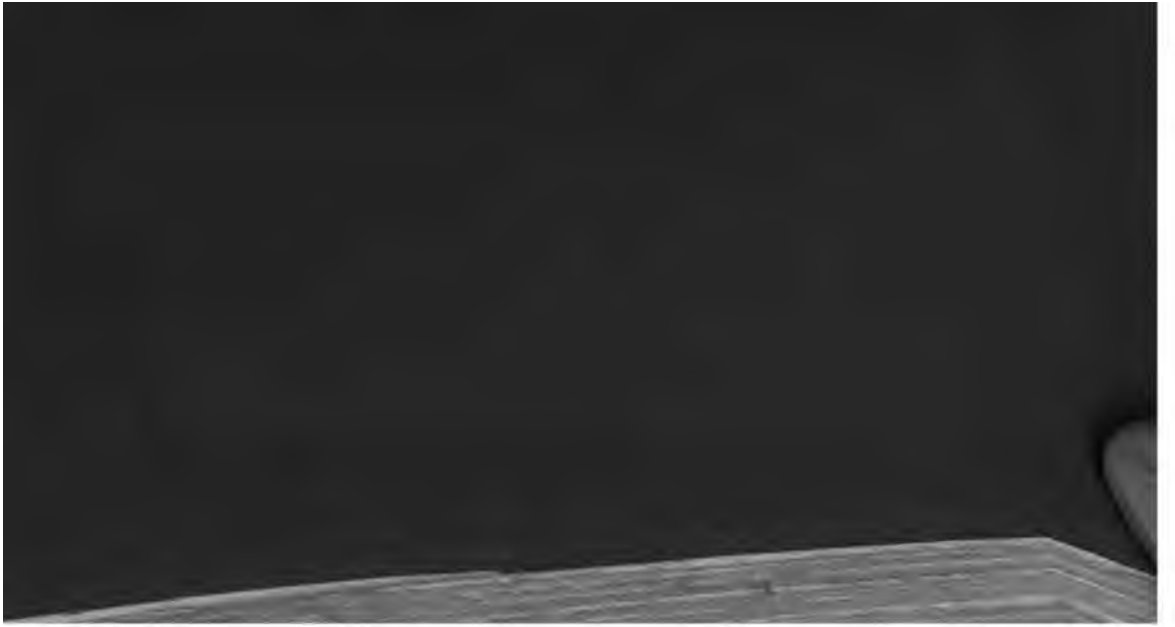
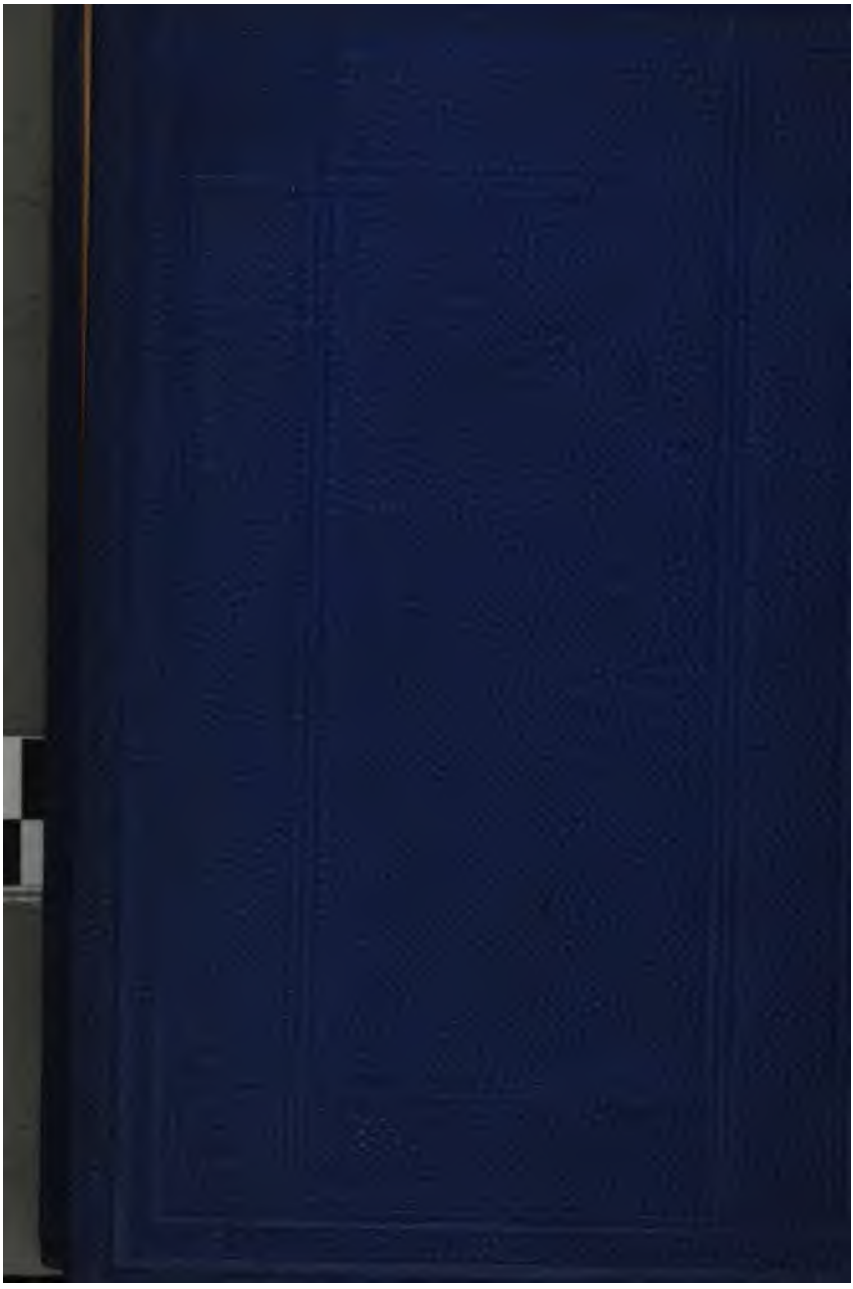
The solitary nun, or hermit in his cell, given up to a life of meditation and union with God in prayer, draws strength from contemplating the example of Mary, who ever kept all the words of God and of His instruments and messengers, "pondering them in her heart." But the active Sister of Mercy, the zealous Apostolic Missionary, the soldier in battle or the sailor on the deep seas, or young men and women fighting against the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil,—all these alike have recourse to the same "help of Christians."

But above all—strangest phenomenon of this universal devotion, and strongest seal and sanction of its heavenly origin—it belongs equally *to every* condition of conscience. Souls aspiring

after religious perfection, rise by imitation of her, they tread closely in her footsteps and look to her for help; they know that though her Divine Maternity be a privilege that is incommunicable, yet that they may still aspire to the most intimate union with Jesus in the spirit, which was her higher blessedness. On the other hand, it is no less true that some little pious thought, or act, or habit in connection with the Blessed Virgin is often the last spark of Christian faith and hope and practice which lingers in the hardened sinner's heart. Mary is at once the Queen of Angels and Saints, and the Refuge of Sinners. She, the Virgin of Virgins, under the gentle and sanctifying influences of whose purity so many innocent souls are nurtured, so many choirs of Virgins spring up and multiply in the Church, "like the flowers of roses in the days of the spring, and as the lilies that are on the brink of the water" *—she commonly is the last link with Heaven which the sinner abandons, and the first which he lays hold of when he begins to return from his wanderings.

Surely, this wonderful adaptation of devotion to Mary, to every age and condition and circum-

* Ecclus. l. 8.

stance of man's life, and especially of his supernatural life, ought to engage the attention of the indifferent and conciliate the prejudices of the most hostile. If the mechanism of the hand, so curiously and wonderfully wrought, and its adaptation to the needs and conveniences of human life, may be successfully urged as a proof of the wisdom and power of the Creator, so a similar argument for the Divine origin of this devotion to Mary would not be without foundation. To ourselves it is as a stamp set upon its Divinity. The work of all true religion is to unite man to his Maker; devotion to Mary is a bond of union between God and all His creatures; it is equally suited to all classes, seeming to have some special adaptation for each; therefore it was instituted by God and is a part of the Christian faith.

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